

ANC

OTHER WORLDS

SCIENCE STORIES

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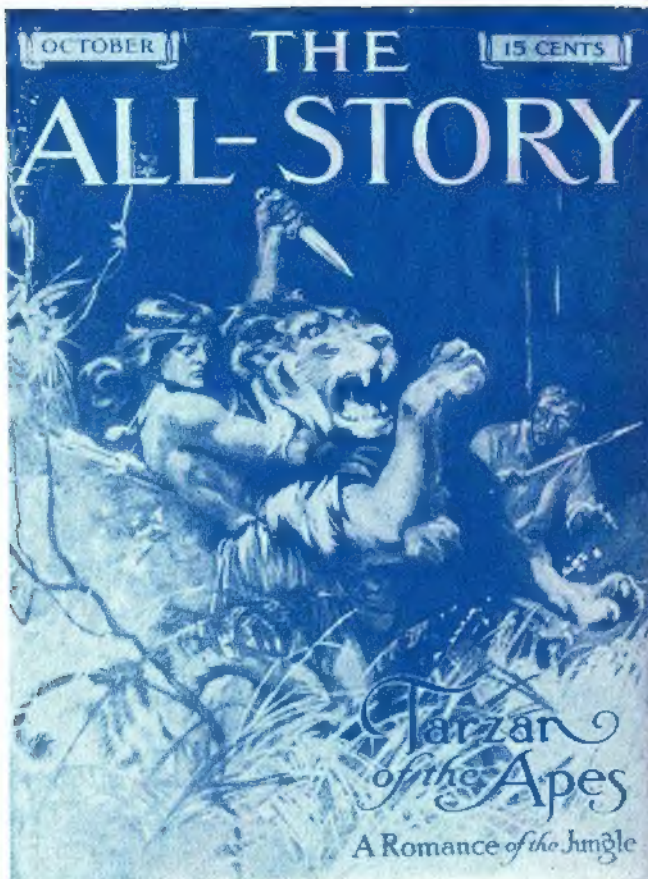
THE JUSTICE OF MARTIN BRAND

By G. H. IRWIN

ENCHANTED VILLAGE By A. E. VAN VOGT

WAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE AIR By RAY BRADBURY

The cover of the Oct. 1912 All-Story, which was the first Tarzan illustration, and the first Tarzan Tale.



A TRIBUTE TO

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

By Darrell C. Richardson

TARZAN of the Apes first appeared as a novel in the October 1912 *All-Story* Magazine. It was Edgar Rice Burroughs' second published story and the third tale he had ever written. Previously *Under the Moons of Mars* had appeared serially in the same publication under the pseudonym Norman Bean. "Tarzan" was an immediate hit, and its publication in book form in 1914 started its author on the path to fame and fortune. Today Tarzan has established his durability and is more popular than ever. Through movies, radio, comic strip and television he has been introduced to a prodigious worldwide public. 291 newspapers in America bring Tarzan to 15,672,000 people; 28 foreign countries add millions more. There have been 364 Tarzan radio programs, 25 Tarzan movies have been made, featuring 10 movie Tarzans. Half a billion people have seen Tarzan on the screen. There have been 24 Tarzan books in all, with three more yet to be published. Even more popular with the fantasy reader is John Carter of Mars. Millions of readers the world over think of Mars as the planet Barsoom, populated by

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EDITOR, Raymond A. Palmer
MANAGING EDITOR, Beatrice Mahaffey
ASSOCIATE EDITOR, Marge Sanders Budwig



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Cover painting by Malcolm Smith

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EDITORIAL

DID YOU readers ever stop to think how much drivel you've had to absorb against your will in editorials by editors who could put the natural gas companies out of business in short order if they'd only connect their typewriters to the end of the gas pipes that lead from the oil-fields? It seems that there is a good old American custom that every jerk who puts out a magazine has to foul up the first few pages of his publication with what he calls an "editorial" but which is really only spilling his guts, and he's got a lot of them!

As a matter of fact, we've just finished writing an editorial, and wound up by tearing it up and throwing it in the waste basket. Which, we admit, is where it belonged.

Just what do you put in an editorial for a magazine called **OTHER WORLDS!** It's an insult to the reader's intelligence to list the stories for him and tell him just why each one is the most wonderful story he's ever read. He can judge that for himself. And it's stuffy to fill the editorial with scientific tripe picked up out of scientific journals and passed on with sanctimonious wisecracks about how "we told you so long before the scientists found it out." Now whatinell does that make us? Prophets—or just plain egotists looking for a pat on the back? We guess it's the latter. In the first place, we didn't know we were prophets until the scientists, with much labor, invented something close to what we'd dreamed up between pipefuls of opium.

Then there's the old-time editorial

in the small-town newspaper, where the editor crusades for law and order and gets foully murdered by the thugs and his blood clots the type so it can't be used without soaking it in kerosene. However, those days are gone, and today when you spout about justice, you are only trying to prove why you should earn a living, and the other guy oughta starve if he isn't as smart as you think you are.

Or, you could be a crackpot and try to remake the world. You could yell about how scientific knowledge is outstripping man's spiritual advancement, and he's going to pulverize himself with the H-bomb. The inference to an argument like that is that we ought to scrap our scientific advancement and go back to covered wagons and horses. Or maybe put a "governor" on a scientist's mind so he can think only so fast.

Or, we can collect quotes by both sides, like Einstein says the bomb will kill us all, and a purple-nosed general says the best defense is a good offense; all of which goes to prove ostriches after all have the best system—they get booted in the tail-feathers, but they haven't built up an advance neurosis worrying about it.

Your editor just doesn't know what an editorial is, so he generally uses this space to have fun. Trouble is, he sometimes isn't very funny. But when a guy falls flat on his face in a mudpuddle, while carrying a stack of clean laundry, that's good for a terrific laugh. So, if we lay an egg with a gag, maybe even that comes

under the heading of fun.

Our editorial conclusion is that editorials aren't to be taken seriously, and considering the nitwits who write them, the reader ought to be conditioned to begin laughing automatically when he starts reading one.

As a matter of illustrating what we mean, we refer to a dozen editorials we've just finished reading. Condensed, the matter stands thusly:

Each issue of every magazine has the best stories ever published in that magazine. The editor, because of his many years of close contact with the public, is fully qualified to testify that the public is public, and you can quote me. The human race cannot be going to the dogs, since it just went there. Ergo, we must be coming back from the dogs. When we get back *from* the dogs, we will go back *to* the dogs. Do you follow? Then you are a dog-follower. The principle of the H-bomb is not fully understood by the scientists, because they have neglected to proceed in an orderly manner. We begin with the A-bomb, but what happened to the B-bomb, the C-bomb, the D-bomb, the E-bomb, the F-bomb and the G-bomb? These fool scientists don't even know what comes after A! So what chance do they have to understand what a Null-A is? Our next conclusion is that readers of science fiction are readers of science fiction, but science fiction need not be written for the adolescent mind, therefore, if written for the mature mind, science fiction can be good literature, and what's more developing to the mind than good literature? Which of course leads us to the conclusion that something must be done to reprint some good literature in science fiction magazines. Accord-

ingly we are reprinting all the old corn, and passing it off as a classic. In science fiction, a classic is a yarn everybody has read before, but which can be published without paying for it because the author was damfool enough to sell all rights. So, when he sees his story reprinted as a classic, without receiving a check, he will learn the hard way that he has been a fool and in the future he will be a wiser man and will turn out good literature instead of junk that editors can sneer at and buy all rights. It is a well-known fact that all editors recognize a terrific story when they see one, and reward the author accordingly. That is why the idiot who bought the editor a beer gets three cents a word, while the incipient Hemingway gets rooked for a cent on a yarn that will be read long after the editor's tombstone reads: "There's always room at the top of the masthead for somebody else if you can't sell magazines, fella!"

All of which brings us to the only important part of this editorial, the part where we extend our sincere thanks to Ray Bradbury for giving us our chance to buy his *Way in the Middle of the Air*; and to A. E. van Vogt for his *Enchanted Village*, which we enjoyed very much; and to G. H. Irwin for a story about people who act like ordinary people and make us like them very much, even though under the same circumstances we'd funk out in terror. We appreciate, too, simple little yarns like William F. Temple's shortie; and S. J. Byrne's *Colossus II*, which is part of a novel he wrote that got away from him and became a word-colossus so big it had to be broken into three sections to publish. All we hope is you readers enjoy 'em as much as we did. *Rap.*

ENCHANTED VILLAGE

EXPLORERS of a new frontier they had been called before they left for Mars.

For a while after the ship crashed into a Martian desert, killing all on board except—miraculously—this one man, Bill Jenner spat the words occasionally into the constant, sand-laden wind. He despised himself for the pride he had felt when he first heard them.

His fury faded with each mile that he walked, and his black grief for his friends became a gray ache. Slowly he realized that he had made a ruinous misjudgment.

He had underestimated the speed at which the rocketship had been traveling. He'd guessed that he would have to walk three hundred miles to reach the shallow, Polar sea he and the others had observed as they glided in from outer space. Actually, the ship must have flashed an immensely greater distance before it hurtled down out of control.

The days stretched behind him, seemingly as numberless as the hot, red, alien sand that scorched through his tattered clothes. This huge scarecrow of a man kept moving across the endless, arid waste—He would not give up.

By the time he came to the mountain, his food had long been gone. Of his four waterbags, only one remained; and that was so close to being empty that he merely wet his cracked lips and swollen tongue when-

ever his thirst became unbearable.

Jenner climbed high before he realized that it was not just another dune that had barred his way. He paused, and as he gazed up at the mountain that towered above him, he cringed a little. For an instant, he felt the hopelessness of this mad race he was making to nowhere—but he reached the top. He saw that below him was a depression surrounded by hills as high or higher than the one on which he stood. Nestled in the valley they made was a village.

He could see trees, and the marble floor of a courtyard. A score of buildings were clustered around what seemed to be a central square. They were mostly low-constructed, but there were four towers pointing gracefully into the sky. They shone in the sunlight with a marble luster.

Faintly, there came to Jenner's ears a thin, high-pitched whistling sound. It rose, fell, faded completely, then came up again clearly and unpleasantly. Even as Jenner ran toward it, the noise grated on his ears, eerie and unnatural.

He kept slipping on smooth rock, and bruised himself when he fell. He rolled halfway down into the valley. The buildings remained new and bright, when seen from nearby. Their walls flashed with reflections. On every side was vegetation—reddish-green shrubbery—yellow-green trees laden with purple and red fruit.

With ravenous intent, Jenner head-

By A. E. VAN VOGT

The village had been deserted for ages, but it still had everything necessary to support life—Marian life . . . only Jenner was an Earthman.

ed for the nearest fruit tree. Close up, the tree looked dry and brittle. The large red fruit he tore from the lowest branch however, was plump and juicy.

As he lifted it to his mouth, he remembered that he had been warned during his training period to taste nothing on Mars until it had been

*Illustration by
Jon Arstrom*



chemically examined. But that was meaningless advice to a man whose only chemical equipment was in his own body.

Nevertheless, the possibility of danger made him cautious. He took his first bit gingerly. It was bitter to his tongue, and he spat it out hastily. Some of the juice which remained in his mouth seared his gums. He felt the fire of it, and he reeled from nausea. His muscles began to jerk, and he lay down on the marble to keep himself from falling. After what seemed like hours to Jenner, the awful trembling finally went out of his body, and he could see again. He looked up despidingly at the tree.

The pain finally left him, and slowly he relaxed. A soft breeze rustled the dry leaves. Nearby trees took up that gentle clamor, and it struck Jenner that the wind here in the valley was only a whisper of what it had been on the flat desert beyond the mountain.

There was no other sound now. Jenner abruptly remembered the high-pitched, ever-changing whistle he had heard. He lay very still, listening intently, but there was only the rustling of the leaves. The noisy shrilling had stopped. He wondered if it had been an alarm, to warn the villagers of his approach.

Anxiously, he climbed to his feet and fumbled for his gun. A sense of disaster shocked through him. It wasn't there. His mind was a blank, and then he vaguely recalled that he had first missed the weapon more than a week before. He looked around him

uneasily, but there was not a sign of creature life. He braced himself. He couldn't leave, as there was nowhere to go. If necessary, he would fight to the death to remain in the village.

Carefully Jenner took a sip from his water bag, moistening his cracked lips and his swollen tongue. Then he replaced the cap, and started through a double line of trees toward the nearest building. He made a wide circle to observe it from several vantage points. On one side a low, broad archway opened into the interior. Through it, he could dimly make out the polished gleam of a marble floor.

Jenner explored the buildings from the outside, always keeping a respectful distance between him and any of the entrances. He saw no sign of animal life. He reached the far side of the marble platform on which the village was built, and turned back decisively. It was time to explore interiors.

He chose one of the four-tower buildings. As he came within a dozen feet of it, he saw that he would have to stoop low to get inside.

Momentarily, the implications of that stopped him. These buildings had been constructed for a life form that must be very different from human beings.

He went forward again, bent down, and entered reluctantly, every muscle tensed.

He found himself in a room without furniture. However, there were several low, marble fences projecting from one marble wall. They formed what looked like a group of four wide,

low stalls. Each stall had an open trough carved out of the floor.

The second chamber was fitted with four inclined planes of marble, each of which slanted up to a dais. Altogether, there were four rooms on the lower floor. From one of them, a circular ramp mounted up, apparently to a tower room.

Jenner didn't investigate the upstairs. The earlier fear that he would find alien life was yielding to the deadly conviction that he wouldn't. No life meant no food, nor chance of getting any. In frantic haste, he hurried from building to building, peering into the silent rooms, pausing now and then to shout hoarsely.

Finally, there was no doubt. He was alone in a deserted village on a lifeless planet, without food, without water—except for the pitiful supply in his bag—and without hope.

He was in the fourth and smallest room of one of the tower buildings when he realized that he had come to the end of his search. The room had a single "stall" jutting out from one wall. Wearily, Jenner lay down in it. He must have fallen asleep instantly.

When he awoke, he became aware of two things, one right after the other. The first realization occurred before he opened his eyes—the whistling sound was back, high and shrill, it wavered at the threshold of audibility.

The other was that a fine spray of liquid was being directed down at him from the ceiling. It had an odor, of which Technician Jenner took a single whiff. Quickly he scrambled

out of the room, coughing, tears in his eyes, his face already burning from chemical reaction.

He snatched his handkerchief and hastily wiped the exposed parts of his body and face.

He reached the outside, and there paused, striving to understand what had happened.

The village seemed unchanged.

Leaves trembled in a gentle breeze. The sun was poised on a mountain peak. Jenner guessed from its position that it was morning again, and that he had slept at least a dozen hours. The glaring white light suffused the valley. Half hidden by trees and shrubbery, the buildings flashed and shimmered.

He seemed to be in an oasis in a vast desert. It was an oasis all right, Jenner reflected grimly, but not for a human being. For him, with its poisonous fruit, it was more like a tantalizing mirage.

He went back inside the building, and cautiously peered into the room where he had slept. The spray of gas had stopped, not a bit of odor lingered, and the air was fresh and clean.

He edged over the threshold, half-inclined to make a test. He had a picture in his mind of a long dead Martian creature lazing on the floor in the "stall" while a soothing chemical sprayed down on its body. The fact that the chemical was deadly to human beings merely emphasized how alien to man was the life that had spawned on Mars. But there seemed little doubt of the reason for the gas. The creature was accustomed to tak-

ing a morning shower.

Inside the "bathroom," Jenner eased himself feet first into the stall. As his hips came level with the stall entrance, the solid ceiling sprayed a jet of yellowish gas straight down upon his legs. Hastily, Jenner pulled himself clear of the stall. The gas stopped as suddenly as it had started.

He tried it again, to make sure it was merely an automatic process. It turned on, then it shut off.

Jenner's thirst-puffed lips parted with excitement. He thought, "If there can be one automatic process, there may be others."

Breathing heavily, he raced into the outer room. Carefully he shoved his legs into one of the two stalls. The moment his hips were in, a steaming gruel filled the trough beside the wall.

He stared at the greasy looking stuff with a horrified fascination—food—and drink. He remembered the poison fruit, and felt repelled, but he forced himself to bend down, and put his finger into the hot, wet substance. He brought it up, dripping, to his mouth.

It tasted flat and pulpy, like boiled wood fiber. It trickled viscously into his throat. His eyes began to water, and his lips drew back convulsively. He realized he was going to be sick, and ran for the outer door—but didn't quite make it.

When he finally got outside, he felt limp and unutterably listless. In that depressed state of mind, he grew aware again of the shrill sound.

He felt amazed that he could have ignored its rasping even for a few

minutes. Sharply, he glanced about, trying to determine its source, but it seemed to have none. Whenever he approached a point where it appeared to be loudest, then it would fade, or shift, perhaps to the far side of the village.

He tried to imagine what an alien culture would want with a mind-shattering noise—although, of course, it would not necessarily have been unpleasant to them.

He stopped, and snapped his fingers as a wild but nevertheless plausible notion entered his mind. Could this be music?

He toyed with the idea, trying to visualize the village as it had been long ago. Here, a music-loving race had possibly gone about its daily tasks to the accompaniment of what was to them beautiful strains of melody.

The hideous whistling went on and on, waxing and waning. Jenner tried to put buildings between himself and the sound. He sought refuge in various rooms, hoping that at least one would be sound-proof. None were. The whistle followed him wherever he went.

He retreated into the desert, and had to climb halfway up one of the slopes before the noise was low enough not to disturb him. Finally, breathless but immeasurably relieved, he sank down on the sand, and thought blankly:

What now?

The scene that spread before him had in it qualities of both heaven and hell. It was all too familiar now

—the red sands, the stony dunes, the small, alien village promising so much and fulfilling so little.

Jenner looked down at it with his feverish eyes, and ran his parched tongue over his cracked, dry lips. He knew that he was a dead man unless he could alter the automatic food-making machines that must be hidden somewhere in the walls and under the floors of the buildings.

In ancient days, a remnant of Martian civilization had survived here in this village. The inhabitants had died off but the village lived on, keeping itself clean of sand, able to provide refuge for any Martian who might come along. But there were no Martians. There was only Bill Jenner, pilot of the first rocketship ever to land on Mars.

He had to make the village turn out food and drink that he could take. Without tools, except his hands; with scarcely any knowledge of chemistry, he must force it to change its habits.

Tensely, he hefted his water bag. He took another sip, and fought the same grim fight to prevent himself from guzzling it down to the last drop. And, when he had won the battle once more, he stood up and started down the slope.

He could last, he estimated, not more than three days. In that time, he must conquer the village.

He was already among the trees when it suddenly struck him that the "music" had stopped. Relieved, he bent over a small shrub, took a good, firm hold of it—and pulled.

It came up easily, and there was

a slab of marble attached to it. Jenner stared at it, noting with surprise that he had been mistaken in thinking the stalk came up through a hole in the marble. It was merely stuck to the surface. Then he noticed something else—the shrub had no roots. Almost instinctively, Jenner looked down at the spot from which he had torn the slab of marble along with the plant. There was sand there.

He dropped the shrub, slipped to his knees, and plunged his fingers into the sand. Loose sand trickled through them. He reached deep, using all his strength to force his arm and hand down—sand—nothing but sand.

He stood up, and frantically tore up another shrub. It also came easily, bringing with it a slab of marble. It had no roots, and where it had been was sand.

With a kind of mindless disbelief, Jenner rushed over to a fruit tree, and shoved at it. There was a momentary resistance, and then the marble on which it stood split, and lifted slowly into the air. The tree fell over with a swish and a crackle as its dry branches and leaves broke and crumbled in a thousand pieces. Underneath where it had been, was sand.

Sand everywhere. A city built on sand. Mars, planet of sand. That was not completely true, of course. Seasonal vegetation had been observed near the polar icecaps. All but the hardiest of it died with the coming of summer. It had been intended that the rocketship land near one of those shallow, tideless seas.

By coming down out of control, the

ship had wrecked more than itself. It had wrecked the chances for life of the only survivor of the voyage.

Jenner came slowly out of his daze. He had a thought then. He picked up one of the shrubs he had already torn loose, braced his foot against the marble to which it was attached and tugged, gently at first, then with increasing strength.

I came loose finally, but there was no doubt that the two were part of a whole. The shrub was growing out of the marble.

Marble? Jenner knelt beside one of the holes from which he had torn a slab, and bent over an adjoining section. It was quite porous—calciferous rock, most likely, but not true marble at all. As he reached toward it, intending to break off a piece, it changed color. Astounded, Jenner drew back. Around the break, the stone was turning a bright orange-yellow. He studied it uncertainly, then tentatively he touched it.

It was as if he had dipped his fingers into searing acid. There was a sharp, biting, burning pain. With a gasp, Jenner jerked his hand clear.

The continuing anguish made him feel faint. He swayed and moaned, clutching the bruised members to his body. When the agony finally faded, and he could look at the injury, he saw that the skin had peeled, and that already blood blisters had formed. Grimly, Jenner looked down at the break in the stone. The edges remained bright orange-yellow.

The village was alert, ready to defend itself from further attacks.

Suddenly weary, he crawled into the shade of a tree. There was only one possible conclusion to draw from what had happened, and it almost defied common sense. This lonely village was alive.

As he lay there, Jenner tried to imagine a great mass of living substance growing into the shape of buildings, adjusting itself to suit another life form, accepting the role of servant in the widest meaning of the term.

If it would serve one race, why not another? If it could adjust to Martians, why not to human beings?

There would be difficulties, of course. He guessed wearily that essential elements would not be available. The oxygen for water could come from the air . . . thousands of compounds could be made from sand . . . though it meant death if he failed to find a solution, he fell asleep even as he started to think about what they might be.

When he awoke, it was quite dark.

Jenner climbed heavily to his feet. There was a drag to his muscles that alarmed him. He wet his mouth from his water bag, and staggered toward the entrance of the nearest building. Except for the scraping of his shoes on the "marble," the silence was intense.

He stopped short—listened, and looked. The wind had died away. He couldn't see the mountains that rimmed the valley, but the buildings were still dimly visible, black shadows in a shadow world.

For the first time, it seemed to him

that, in spite of his new hope, it might be better if he died. Even if he survived, what had he to look forward to? Only too well he recalled how hard it had been to rouse interest in the trip, and to raise the large amount of money required. He remembered the colossal problems that had had to be solved in building the ship, and some of the men who had solved them were buried somewhere in the Martian desert.

It might be twenty years before another ship from Earth would try to reach the only other planet in the solar system that had shown signs of being able to support life.

During those uncountable days and nights, those years, he would be here alone. That was the most he could hope for—if he lived. As he fumbled his way to a dais in one of the rooms, Jenner considered another problem:

How did one let a living village know that it must alter its processes? In a way, it must already have grasped that it had a new tenant. How could he make it realize he needed food in a different chemical combination than that which it had served in the past; that he liked music, but on a different scale system; and that he could use a shower each morning—of water, not of poison gas?

He dozed fitfully, like a man who is sick rather than sleepy. Twice, he wakened, his lips on fire, his eyes burning, his body bathed in perspiration. Several times he was startled into consciousness by the sound of his own harsh voice crying out in anger and fear at the night.

He guessed, then, that he was dying.

He spent the long hours of darkness tossing, turning, twisting, befuddled by waves of heat. As the light of morning came, he was vaguely surprised to realize that he was still alive. Restlessly, he climbed off the dais, and went to the door.

A biting cold wind blew, but it felt good to his hot face. He wondered if there was enough *pneumococcus* in his blood for him to catch pneumonia. He decided not.

In a few moments he was shivering. He retreated back into the house, and for the first time noticed that, despite the doorless doorway, the wind did not come into the building at all. The rooms were cold, but not draughty.

That started an association: Where had his terrible body heat come from? He teetered over to the dais where he had spent the night. Within seconds, he was sweltering in a temperature of about a hundred and thirty.

He climbed off the dais, shaken by his own stupidity. He estimated that he had sweated at least two quarts of moisture out of his dried-up body on that furnace of a bed.

This village was not for human beings. Here, even the beds were heated for creatures who needed temperatures far beyond the heat comfortable for men.

Jenner spent most of the day in the shade of a large tree. He felt exhausted, and only occasionally did he even remember that he had a problem. When the whistling started, it bothered him at first, but he was too

tired to move away from it. There were long periods when he hardly heard it, so dulled were his senses.

Late in the afternoon, he remembered the shrubs and the tree he had torn up the day before, and wondered what had happened to them. He wet his swollen tongue with the last few drops of water in his bag, climbed lackadaisically to his feet, and went to look for the dried-up remains.

There weren't any. He couldn't even find the holes where he had torn them out. The living village had absorbed the dead tissue into itself, and repaired the breaks in its "body."

That galvanized Jenner. He began to think again . . . about mutations, genetic readjustment, life forms adapting to new environments. There'd been lectures on that before the ship left Earth, rather generalized talks designed to acquaint the explorers with the problems men might face on an alien planet. The important principle was quite simple: adjust or die.

The village had to adjust to him. He doubted if he could seriously damage it, but he could try. His own need to survive must be placed on as sharp and hostile a basis as that.

Frantically, Jenner began to search his pockets. Before leaving the rocket, he had loaded himself with odds and ends of small equipment. A jack-knife, a folding metal cup, a printed radio, a tiny super-battery that could be charged by spinning an attached wheel—and for which he had brought along, among other things, a powerful electric fire lighter.

Jenner plugged the lighter into the battery, and deliberately scraped the red-hot end along the surface of the "marble." The reaction was swift. The substance turned an angry purple this time. When an entire section of the floor had changed color, Jenner headed for the nearest stall trough, entering far enough to activate it.

There was a noticeable delay. When the food finally flowed into the trough, it was clear that the living village had realized the reason for what he had done. The food was a pale, creamy color, where earlier it had been a murky gray.

Jenner put his finger into it, but withdrew it with a yell, and wiped his finger. It continued to sting for several moments. The vital question was: had it deliberately offered him food that would damage him, or was it trying to appease him without knowing what he could eat?

He decided to give it another chance, and entered the adjoining stall. The gritty stuff that flooded up this time was yellower. It didn't burn his finger, but Jenner took one taste, and spat it out. He had the feeling that he had been offered a soup made of a greasy mixture of clay and gasoline.

He was thirsty now with a need heightened by the unpleasant taste in his mouth. Desperately, he rushed outside and tore open the water bag, seeking the wetness inside. In his fumbling eagerness, he spilled a few precious drops onto the courtyard. Down he went on his face, and licked them up.

Half a minute later, he was still licking, and there was still water.

The fact penetrated suddenly. He raised himself, and gazed wonderingly at the droplets of water that sparkled on the smooth stone. As he watched, another one squeezed up from the apparently solid surface, and shimmered in the light of the sinking sun.

He bent, and with the tip of his tongue sponged up each visible drop. For a long time, he lay with his mouth pressed to the "marble," sucking up the tiny bits of water that the village doled out to him.

The glowing white sun disappeared behind a hill. Night fell, like the dropping of a black screen. The air turned cold, then icy. He shivered as the wind keened through his ragged clothes. But what finally stopped him was the collapse of the surface from which he had been drinking.

Jenner lifted himself in surprise, and in the darkness gingerly felt over the stone. It had genuinely crumbled. Evidently the substance had yielded up its available water and had disintegrated in the process. Jenner estimated that he had drunk altogether an ounce of water.

It was a convincing demonstration of the willingness of the village to please him, but there was another, less satisfying implication. If the village had to destroy a part of itself every time it gave him a drink, then clearly the supply was not unlimited.

Jenner hurried inside the nearest building, climbed onto a dais—and climbed off again hastily, as the heat blazed up at him. He waited, to give

the Intelligence a chance to realize he wanted a change, then lay down once more. The heat was as great as ever.

He gave that up because he was too tired to persist, and too sleepy to think of a method that might let the village know he needed a different bedroom temperature. He slept on the floor with an uneasy conviction that it could *not* sustain him for long. He woke up many times during the night, and thought: "Not enough water. No matter how hard it tries—" then he would sleep again, only to wake once more, tense and unhappy.

Nevertheless, morning found him briefly alert; and all his steely determination was back—that iron will-power that had brought him at least five hundred miles across an unknown desert.

He headed for the nearest trough. This time, after he had activated it, there was a pause of more than a minute; and then about a thimbleful of water made a wet splotch at the bottom.

Jenner licked it dry, then waited hopefully for more. When none came, he reflected gloomily that somewhere in the village, an entire group of cells had broken down and released their water for him.

Then and there he decided that it was up to the human being, who could move around, to find a new source of water for the village, which could not move.

In the interim, of course, the village would have to keep him alive, until he had investigated the possibilities.

That meant, above everything else, he must have some food to sustain him while he looked around.

He began to search his pockets. Toward the end of his food supply, he had carried scraps and pieces wrapped in small bits of cloth. Crumbs had broken off into the pocket and he had searched often during those long days in the desert. Now by actually ripping the seams, he discovered tiny particles of meat and bread, little bits of grease and other unidentifiable substances.

Carefully, he leaned over the adjoining stall, and placed the scrapings in the trough there. The village would not be able to offer him more than a reasonable facsimile. If the spilling of a few drops on the courtyard could make it aware of his need for water, then a similar offering might give it the clue it needed as to the chemical nature of the food he could eat.

Jenner waited, then entered the second stall and activated it. About a pint of thick, creamy substance trickled into the bottom of the trough. The smallness of the quantity seemed evidence that perhaps it contained water.

He tasted it. It had a sharp, musty flavor, and a stale odor. It was almost as dry as flour—but his stomach did not reject it.

Jenner ate slowly, acutely aware that at such moments as this the village had him at its mercy. He could never be sure that one of the food ingredients was not a slow acting poison.

When he had finished the meal, he went to a food trough in another building. He refused to eat the food that came up, but activated still another trough. This time he received a few drops of water.

He had come purposefully to one of the tower buildings. Now, he started up the ramp that led to the upper floor. He paused only briefly in the room he came to, as he had already discovered that they seemed to be additional bedrooms. The familiar dais was there in a group of three.

What interested him was that the circular ramp continued to wind on upward. First, to another, smaller room that seemed to have no particular reason for being. Then it wound on up to the top of the tower, some seventy feet above the ground. It was high enough for him to see beyond the rim of all the surrounding hilltops. He had thought it might be, but he had been too weak to make the climb before. Now, he looked out to every horizon. Almost immediately, the hope that had brought him up, faded.

The view was immeasurably desolate. As far as he could see was an arid waste, and every horizon was hidden in a mist of wind-blown sand.

Jenner gazed with a sense of despair. If there was a Martian sea out there somewhere, it was beyond his reach.

Abruptly, he clenched his hands in anger against his fate, which seemed inevitable now. At the very worst, he had hoped he would find himself in a mountainous region. Seas and

mountains were generally the two main sources of water. He should have known, of course, that there were very few mountains on Mars. It would have been a wild coincidence if he had actually run into a mountain range.

His fury faded, because he lacked the strength to sustain any emotion. Numbly, he went down the ramp.

His vague plan to help the village ended as swiftly and finally as that.

The days drifted by, but as to how many he had no idea. Each time he went to eat, a smaller amount of water was doled out to him. Jenner kept telling himself that each meal would have to be his last. It was unreasonable for him to expect the village to destroy itself when his fate was certain now.

What was worse, it became increasingly clear that the food was not good for him. He had misled the village as to his needs by giving it stale, perhaps even tainted samples, and prolonged the agony for himself. At times after he had eaten, Jenner felt dizzy for hours. All too frequently, his head ached, and his body shivered with fever.

The village was doing what it could. The rest was up to him, and he couldn't even adjust to an approximation of Earth food.

For two days, he was too sick to drag himself to one of the troughs. Hour after hour, he lay on the floor. Some time during the second night, the pain in his body grew so terrible that he finally made up his mind.

"If I can get to a dais," he told

himself, "the heat alone will kill me; and in absorbing my body, the village will get back some of its lost water."

He spent at least an hour crawling laboriously up the ramp of the nearest dais, and when he finally made it, he lay as one already dead. His last waking thought was: "Beloved friends, I'm coming."

The hallucination was so complete that, momentarily, he seemed to be back in the control room of the rocketship, and all around him were his former companions.

With a sigh of relief, Jenner sank into a dreamless sleep.

He woke to the sound of a violin. It was a sad-sweet music that told of the rise and fall of a race long dead.

Jenner listened for a while, and then with abrupt excitement realized the truth. This was a substitute for the whistling—the village had adjusted its music to him!

Other sensory phenomena stole in upon him. The dais felt comfortably warm, not hot at all. He had a feeling of wonderful physical well-being.

Eagerly, he scrambled down the ramp to the nearest food stall. As he crawled forward, his nose close to the floor, the trough filled with a steamy mixture. The odor was so rich and pleasant that he plunged his face into it, and sipped it up greedily. It had the flavor of thick, meaty soup, and was warm and soothing to his lips and mouth. When he had eaten it all, he did not need a drink of water for the first time.

"I've won!" thought Jenner, "The village has found a way!"

After a while, he remembered something, and crawled to the bathroom. Cautiously, watching the ceiling, he eased himself backward into the shower stall. The yellowish spray came down, cool and delightful.

Ecstatically, Jenner wriggled his

four-foot tail, and, lifted his long snout to let the thin streams of liquid wash away the food impurities that clung to his sharp teeth.

Then he waddled out to bask in the sun, and listen to the timeless music.

THE END

ATOMIC ERROR

By

FORREST J. ACKERMAN

Here is a little storyette which was written in a humorous vein, but taken in the light of the prospect of a super-destructive hydrogen bomb and its threat to civilization, it may not be quite so funny after all is said and done.

Illustration by Jon Arltrom

HE WOKE UP screaming. He felt scalded all over. So this was what radiation burn from an atomic bomb felt like!

He had feared this night since 1945—this night when a robot rocket would jet over the North Pole at supersonic speed; the night that an unknown assassin nation would massacre America a-bed; that atomic conflagration would transform the metropolises of the United States into skyscraping mushroom clouds.

He had hoped only that obliteration would come instantaneously and

painlessly, that he would be volatilized in his dreams, either to awake in the Hereafter, where there theoretically were no atomic bombs, or—never to awake.

But there was always the unfaceable possibility that he would be caught on the fringe of the fission; then God knew what death would be like. Not a ripping asunder too rapid for the senses to record, but a slow death: A peeling away of the skin in leprous patches; a brain fried in its skull, shriveled and convulsed like worms writhing in a fiery skillet; eyes

liquefying and oozing out of their sockets like sap from a tree.

The man knew himself: Not a coward, but a cerebrotonic—super-sensitive to the thought of pain. A thousand times he had suffered premature agony, envisioning his life ending in an atomic cauldron of radiation, his body burning in waves of invisible fire. He couldn't take a death like that. That was why he protected himself with an automatic. He always slept with it under his pillow. He reached for it now.

Pray God the radiation had not warped it, melted the barrel or exploded the cartridges!

In the darkness he groped. He couldn't see. He couldn't hear a sound. He was conscious only of the prickling sensation all over his body.

His fingers found the gun. It was hot. In terror mixed with relief he jerked it to his temple.

"Now what could have made him do that?" the fire chief puzzled. "He wasn't in any danger. The steam didn't even really scald him to amount to anything. He might have been a little dazed—anybody'd be shocked, sure, to have a boiler blow up underneath 'em in the middle of the night—but I called to him, 'You're okay, Mister,' just a second before he fished under his pillow for the pistol."

"Poor Mr. Vance." The hotel manager shook his head regretfully. "He was born deaf, and on top of that lost his sight about two years ago."

THE END

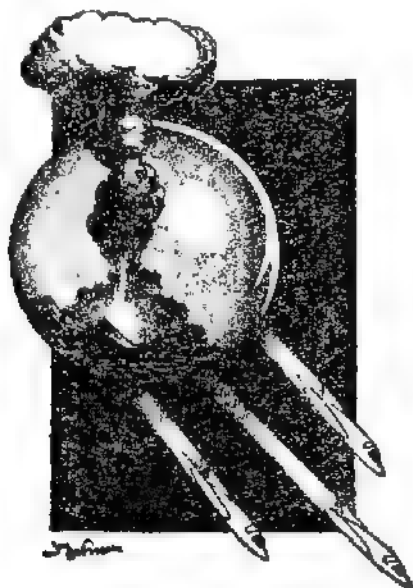




Illustration by Hannes Boh

WISHER TAKES ALL

By WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

If you ever meet a fairy, and are granted a wish, don't try to be clever—you might very easily outsmart yourself . . . and get nothing!

BRIGGS swept out under the glassware counter, where he had not swept for many a day. Something like a tinsel-adorned Christmas-tree fairy came tumbling out with the dust. Only she picked herself up and dusted off her wings, which a Christmas-tree fairy would hardly do.

"Hello," said Briggs. "What are you—animal, vegetable, or mineral?"

"I'm a fairy," said the fairy. "Hibernating. We're pretty rare, you know. Incidentally, before I get back to sleep, would you like three wishes?"

"How much?" asked Briggs.

"Quite free. We're not allowed to charge."

"Okay, fire away," said Briggs promptly.

"Well, what's your first wish?"

"I wish I had a hundred wishes," said Briggs.

"What?" said the fairy faintly.

"You can keep the change—I mean the other two wishes. Don't believe in putting too keen an edge on business," said Briggs generously.

"That's nice of you. Oh, well, start wishing. . . ."

"My first wish is for larger business premises. My second wish is for per-

fect and lasting health. My third wish. . . ."

Presently: "Your ninety-ninth wish?" asked the fairy exhaustedly.

"Um . . . I wish I could always know what the other guy's got in his hand at gin rummy."

"Granted. And your last wish?"

"I wish I had another hundred wishes."

The fairy reeled.

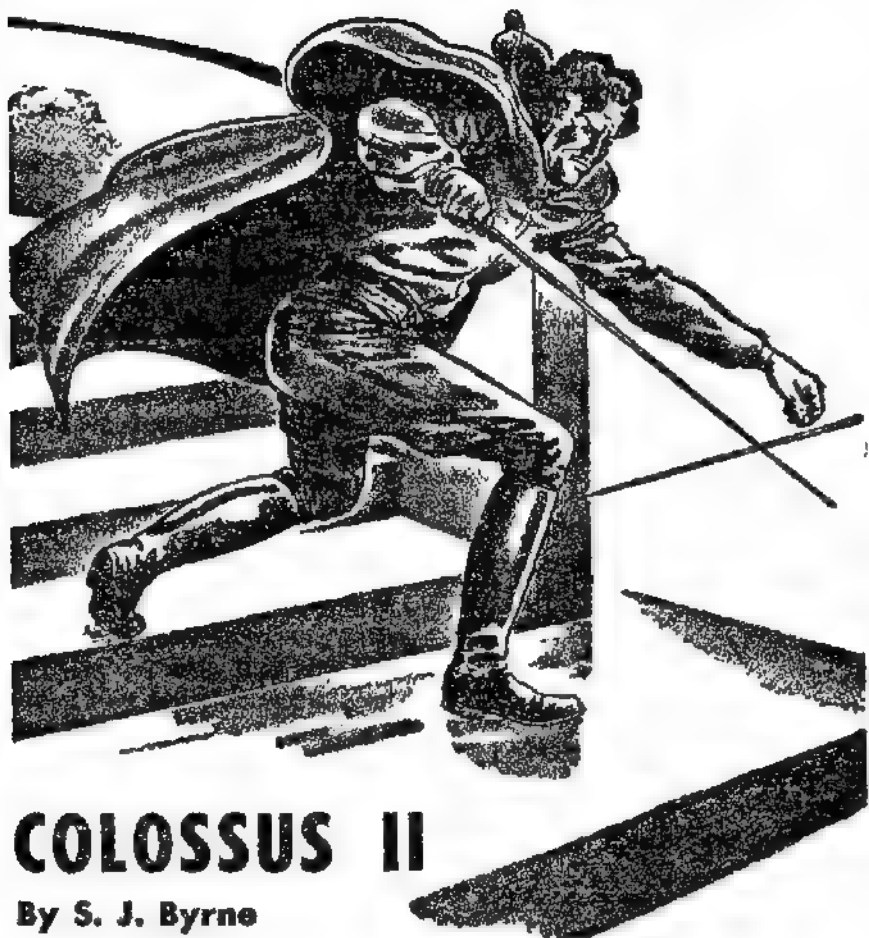
"Really!" she protested. "Is that your idea of fair business? You should realize it's hard work for me. I've made you the strongest man in the world, the best pitcher, the best pool player. You can play the piano, the piccolo, the trumpet, the zither. Your corns are gone. And you are the richest man in the world—all that juggling with currency takes it out of one, you know."

"Yes, I understand," said Briggs, soothingly. "I feel pretty mean about it, in a way. I wish I could give you a wish or something."

He stopped, realizing.

"Thanks a lot," said the fairy quickly, and quite brightened up. "I'll grant you that wish. You're a nasty man. I wish I'd never met you."

Nor had she.



COLOSSUS II

By S. J. Byrne

In the catacombs of Berlin, the Nameless Ones plotted a new war to overthrow all the world—but they faced the gathering might of the men from Underground Agarthi and the Moon.

THE TAXI squeezed through Kaiser Wilhelm Strasse and turned right on Horst Wessel into Prenzlauer, on its way to Weissensee. Janice Maine looked forward with some anxiety to the reunion with her father. Strangely,



Illustrated by Bill Tarry

though, her father had not requested to speak to her on the visiphone, nor had he given instructions for her to wait at the airport for his town car. They had merely issued her a special, diplomatic permit and she had gone through customs practically in

routine fashion. After five years of not seeing her, his only daughter, who had cared for him almost like a wife ever since her mother died, to hear from her should have produced an unusual response from him. But there was nothing—only the en-

try permit.

They were out on Lehder Strasse now and the traffic was quite thin. The chauffeur said, "*Fräulein*, I don't like those two sedans that are following us. Maybe I'd better slow up and see if those fellows want something. After all, a fellow has to watch out for his neck these days."

The taxi turned off into a very narrow side street and came to a stop. One of the sedans parked ahead of it and one parked behind it. Janice reached into her purse and gripped her little pistol. This was obviously a trap!

As she saw two tall gunmen in black overcoats and black hats step out of each car and approach her, with the taxi driver sitting very calmly at his wheel, she thought of Agarthi and its invigorating, life-prolonging light, its exotic gardens and heavenly perfumes; she thought of that unforgettable episode with Rocky in the swimming pool enclosure, felt again his strong, tattooed, life-loving, fight-loving arms about her, his lips against hers. She regretted that she had torn herself away from that magic threshold of happiness, that she had refused to be his wife. Ignominious death in a rain-spattered alley of Berlin was a far cry from the Heaven on Earth that was Agarthi.

Knowing that this was the end and that her pistol was a useless toy in front of these gun-masters, she only watched them through a film of moisture in her eyes as they pointed their automatics at her and prepared to pull the triggers . . .

But nothing happened.

For a long time the men only stood there, as though paralyzed, while her head rang like a bell. It seemed that her very skull vibrated with that ringing noise! Suddenly, the four gunmen collapsed, unconscious, onto the street, and in the same instant the taxi driver started driving away as though the devil were after him. She saw his face in the rear vision mirror and knew that he was driving in a trance!

Somebody was helping her! It couldn't be Agarthi, for three reasons: she had demonstrated that she was an enemy of Agarthi, she had made an attempt on the King's life, and Agarthi was too far removed from Berlin to be effective here. No, she reasoned, her father had known the danger she was in. His scientific corps, headed by that German genius who was equal to Russia's Dr. Borg, the Nameless Ones' Chief of Research, Dr. Gerhardt Eidelmann, was protecting her by means of some clever new device.

When she saw that the chauffeur was heading definitely for her street, Friedrich Strasse, she took new courage and nursed the conviction that she had merely been running the gamut of opposition interference to get to her house, that her father was doing all in his power to protect her until he could really show himself and take her gratefully into his arms.

With a joyful smile of relief, she paid off the bewildered chauffeur and ran up the pompous stairway in front of the Count's ancestral man-

sion. A butler whom she had not seen before opened the door. "Please have my luggage brought in," she said as she started in the door.

He blocked her path. "And who are you?" he asked, bluntly.

"The Count's daughter!" she retorted. "Would you mind permitting me to enter my own house?"

"Since when did *he* have a daughter?"

Janice sputtered. "How long have you worked here?" she asked.

"Three years."

"And you mean to say—"

"I have worked here three years and during that time the Count never mentioned he had a daughter—"

This was enough for Janice's hot temper. She had her pistol out and it was pointed straight at his belicose paunch. "Did it ever occur to you, *Dummkopf*, that the Count would have a very good reason for hiding the fact, inasmuch as I have been serving the Cause for five years as a secret agent abroad?"

The butler's bushy brows turned up their arches. His mouth opened in speechless, gold-toothed amazement as he looked down at the gun and absorbed what she said.

"Now will you kindly step out of the way and let me in?" she said.

In a lightning flash of legerdemain, the butler ducked, almost threw her arm out of joint, and took her gun away from her before she could pull the trigger. He pinned her arm to her back. He stood behind her and prodded her with the gun. "Suppose we hear what the Count has to say

about it!" he said.

Count Georg Heinrich Wolfgang von Immerschoen still wore the pasty complexion of a consumptive, and he had added another set of pouches under his sickly gray eyes. But no smile of welcome! Just that poker face that told her he was either mad, worried, or embarrassed.

"*Papi!*" she exclaimed, still in the butler's grip. "What have they done to you? What is the matter, dear? Don't you know me?"

The Count did not flicker an eyelash, but he made a gesture with his hands and the butler released her.

"Begging your pardon, sir," said the butler in mortified amazement. "You never told me you had a—"

Another gesture of those pale, blue-veined hands, and the butler gulped. "I—I'll go get the baggage, sir!" he said, and disappeared.

Janice ran to her father and threw her arms around his neck, sobbing. "*Papi! Papi!* You have needed me so! They haven't taken care of you! But your *Irmchen* is home now and things will be different!"

The Count made a half-hearted attempt to pat her hand. "Thank God you are safe," he said. "It is a shock to see you. I thought you were dead."

Then came the shock of Janice's life. A little bell buzzed in her skull, and she was suddenly aware that she was reading her father's mind!

How in the devil did she get here? came his thought. *Kerlberg, Semmelkopf, Singerman and Schmelterling—my best agents. And they couldn't*

take care of her! Why did she have to come! I can't protect her. The Nameless Ones will not have her here in Berlin. And of all nights, why did she have to choose tonight to pop up after five years of absence, when the cartel group meets under this very roof! I have failed the Nameless Ones. They ordered me to kill her and I must! It's for the Cause, and that's more important than my own flesh and blood!

Vertigo tore through her consciousness like a cyclone. In spite of herself, she started to faint. But some counterbalancing force suddenly penetrated her being like a golden ray of life-giving energy. The blackness cleared and she felt unaccountably alert and strong. *Beware!* came a thought into her head, and she turned from her father to see a strange man standing in the doorway of the library. Simultaneously, she felt her father's sudden surge of abject fear and she knew that she was looking at a being whom she had often heard discussed in previous years but never actually seen. She knew that she was looking at one of the Nameless Ones, at one of those mysterious, hidden "bosses" of the world, to whom international cartel chiefs reported in humble subjection.

The man was tall, with a distinctly military bearing, cold and sharp like a saber. He wore immaculate evening clothes and a monocle. His eyes were black and glittering, reminding Janice of Stephen Germain in a way, except that here was the aspect of evil. His age was beyond forty but otherwise indefinable. The

face had something about it which could not be remembered. The features were normal enough, but something was missing, missing in a way that bothered human instinct. Janice had to fight against her own fear of this man as he stood there in the doorway looking at her.

The Count sprang chubbily to his feet at once. His was a short, Napoleonic figure, slightly deteriorated by toneless flabbiness, and he looked suddenly very ridiculous and pitiable as he stood there with his popping eyes and stared and sweated. Janice had never seen him like this before in her life, and for the first time she realized that the King of the World was right. Her father was a catspaw!

Anger swept away her fears and she faced the intruder boldly. "I don't believe," she said, "that we have been introduced. Father—" She turned to him, expecting at least an attempt at the usual social amenities.

But the Count only turned pastier and said nothing. The Nameless One ignored her with icy deliberation.

"The Council," he said, tonelessly, "is about to begin."

Then the Count found his voice. He smiled and winced and almost stuttered all at the same time. "The Council! Yes!" He started forward, turned back, took Janice's arm, released it, then backed away from her and said, "You—ah—don't feel well! You wish to retire, *nicht wahr?*"

And without further ado he marched out of the room with his too immaculate summoner. But not before Janice discovered something that

made her teeth want to chatter. She had found that she could read her father's mind in the instant she willed it, but when she tried to read the stranger's mind there was no result, *as though he did not even exist!*

Janice searched the house but could find no one. Yet she remembered what she had read in her father's mind: — *under this very roof.* The Council Room had to be somewhere—perhaps in the basement. But on second thought she knew that was unlikely because the basement was chopped up into many small partitions, for liquor storage, trunks and general keepsakes, winter preserves and so forth. No, it had to be somewhere else. Perhaps a secret sub-cellar!

That gave her ideas. Her mind reverted to the elevator her father had once had installed in the house for her invalid mother. After she had died he had completely modernized it. It was the latest magnetic type, for use in skyscrapers, but the mansion only had three stories. Now she remembered with a start that she had been sent to America just as the alteration work was begun, when she was about fifteen years of age. Why had she always been so blind and trusting? Why was it that only *now* she could see these things clearly? That elevator led to the Council Room of the Nameless Ones—deep down below the house!

She went to the elevator and stepped inside. After closing its steel door, she pressed the button marked "K" and the cage dropped so rapid-

ly and so freely that she thought she had fallen into a huge cavern and was going to crash. However, she soon ascertained that the elevator was following a regular shaft into the depths of the Earth. Her calculations told her that she had descended perhaps two thousand feet before she stopped.

For the first time she realized how foolhardy she had been. What would happen to her was only too obvious if she should step right out into a full scale session of the Nameless Ones. Still, there was nothing else to do now.

Experimentally, she tried to concentrate on reading someone's thoughts, on the outside of the elevator. And she read thoughts, the thoughts of a German soldier who stood on guard just outside . . .

When will I ever get assigned to the Schwalbenkorps? he was thinking.

Janice tried to concentrate on the guard's falling asleep. The little bell buzzed faintly in her skull, and soon she knew by his dwindling stream of thought that he was asleep.

She opened the elevator door and stepped out. As she did so, the elevator automatically began its return trip upward.

She was in a rock-walled tunnel which was illuminated by fluorescent tubes. It stretched away in a curve out of sight. At her feet, sprawled blissfully in a corner, was a German corporal. She relieved him of his radium pistol and began to move down the tunnel.

She had not gone very far before

she heard the sound of soldiers marching. In order to avoid detection she entered a very narrow niche in the wall which gave admittance to a small passageway paralleling the tunnel. Following this hastily for a short distance, she came to a flight of stone steps. Once she had climbed them she encountered a turn in the passage to the right. Slits were cut in the left wall, and through these she could see a large cavern that stretched away into dimness.

To her surprise, the floor was smoothly paved and had traffic lines painted on it. Directly below she saw a parking area in which approximately ten beautiful cars were parked.

Somehow, these cars had been driven down here from the surface! The Council Chamber, she reasoned, must be very close.

She walked a few steps down a passageway. To her right was a door, and inside was a dimly lighted room. A soldier showing the arm insignia of the Technical Corps was seated there with his back toward her, intent upon the controls of a very strange looking machine. His head was covered with what looked like a beauty parlor hair dryer, and metal disks touched the base of his neck and his temples. Before him was a lighted visiscreen in which the Council Chamber was plainly visible.

She looked at the radium pistol in her hand. No sense in killing this man. But she wanted to work that machine herself. By means of it she could not only see everybody in the Council Chamber but could also read

everybody's mind. She lowered the pistol and concentrated on having the fellow fall asleep. Soon he did. She had to rush forward to grab him and prevent his strange helmet from crashing into the visiscreen. It cost her considerable effort to drag the operator from his seat, but she finally managed it. After disarming him, she sat down at the control panel.

Her hands knew what to do with the controls if her mind did not. It seemed that Agarthi had been waiting precisely for this advantageous moment, because the bell in her head was now ringing loudly. Okay, she knew whose side she was on now. She would help them. Let Agarthi learn what it wanted to know through her own eyes and mind!

Before her in the visiscreen was a complete picture of the Council Chamber. At one end, on a raised platform, sat six of the Nameless Ones in their elegant evening clothes, all of them characterized by that certain missing something in their faces that bothered instinct. Below them was the chair and the elaborate desk of the Chairman of the Council, her own father. Below him at a black, marble-topped conference table, sat ten very frightened looking men, five on each side.

Before them sat the key men of the world, the cartel leaders. At the moment in which Janice began to listen, a man named Fritz Oberhausen was making some concluding remarks about a man named Rothbart.

"The more favorable his position becomes with the public," Ober-

hausen complained, "the more egotistical and demanding he becomes. Of course, through your generosity we are able to supply most of his physical demands just as long as the public does not know the truth about him. When he wanted a full scale medieval castle with modern facilities to live in, we built it for him—*underground*. We resell half of his specially built limousines and he doesn't know the difference. But that *harem* of his!" Oberhausen was sweating, his eyes wide with the horror of what he knew. "*He plays bluebeard!* We can't procure enough women if he's going to kill them all—not the intelligent and beautiful women *he* wants! Especially if they are all supposed to be connoisseurs of classical music. And that Schwarzhans! He has too much freedom! I am sorry to report that Rothbart and his castle are getting out of hand."

Count von Immerschoen was no longer in the condition in which Janice had seen him in the library. He was like his old self, cold and peremptory.

"This is not a place in which to report failures or personal difficulties," he said. "Rothbart's efficiency rating with the German public is ninety-eight percent, the most remarkable ever recorded. Even in adjoining countries his average runs sixty-five. Therefore, appeasing his wants and keeping him satisfied is more important than your own feelings or interests. If that is not clear, Herr Oberhausen—"

"I understand, mein Herr!" Ober-

hausen hastened to exclaim.

"Then you are dismissed!"

Oberhausen was only too glad to scuttle out of the room . . .

Whereupon, other world affairs and problems were discussed. It would be well to let the Chicago negotiations succeed in establishing the gold ounce at fifty dollars because England would finally be forced to take advantage of her long withheld South African gold reserves and thus counterbalance the U. S. monopoly. Wheat should go up five percent. Also butterfat. Hold steel steady on the market but let its price be boosted through labor union demands for higher wages. Keep a skeleton staff busy in armament industries through the fomentation of temporary wars and revolutions.

Janice took special note of some remarks made concerning Russia and the recent great War. This time, one of the Nameless Ones spoke.

"Our most immediate problem is our war with Agarthi." Janice stared and strained to hear every word now. "The Elder Gods said that Agarthi would have to take over world government in one year. That still leaves us nine months to make sure Agarthi does *not* take over. The first step is the shaping of public opinion. Tonight the Indicator showed world wide non-belief versus belief in Agarthi and the Elder Gods as fifty-five to forty-five. That is still a very dangerous percentage of belief. It must be lowered still more. You must ridicule Agarthi and the Elder Gods.

"The next step, to be carried out simultaneously, is domination of the underworld. Mr. Chairman, how many of the Schwalbenkorps are now searching the natural caves?"

"We have close to a hundred thousand men down there now, sir," replied Von Immerschoen.

"Send another fifty thousand, as many as you can train for the job. A hundred thousand more, if possible. They must block off the grav-sled ways that lead to Agarthi so that the migrant Agarthians cannot join forces with our main enemy. They must find all the machines and weapons and accumulate them as swiftly as possible in the Berlin area. Above all, we need more stationary war rays for fighting any chance extra-terrestrials as well as the Agarthians. The latter have space ships. We must also get hold of space ships. We need tunnel boring equipment and a larger type teletransporter than has been found to date. The ones Dr. Eidelmann has are not powerful enough to reach Agarthi. Even of the smaller ranged teletransporters he requires as many as he can get for the *Doppelgänger* project. If he succeeds at that, it will be a great contribution."

Janice suddenly straightened up when she felt the muzzle of a radium pistol in her back. She turned her head enough to observe that the room was full of soldiers.

"Get on your feet!" said the one behind her, while two others picked up two radium pistols from her lap.

When she got up and turned around, she did not see any faces

that looked particularly friendly. These veteran guards were frightened, themselves, at the sheer magnitude of her offense.

"How did you get in here?" asked her captor. He was a tall, lean fellow with jutting eyebrows, the lanky Tyrolean type that was streamlined from leaning against the wind on a pair of swift skis, she thought.

But she was also thinking about the little bell ringer in her head that had been warning her of danger and paralyzing people so handily. Where was it now? Suddenly the ghastly thought came to her that Agarthi had gotten what it wanted out of her and did not need her any more! She tried to read her captor's mind, but nothing happened.

Bitterness suddenly choked her. *Twice cast out!* First her father's group had told her she was not needed. Now Agarthi was through with her! It was the disillusionment that hurt. She had really expected a better deal. But, after all, she had tried to kill the King. Maybe she deserved what she was getting, which, of course, could be nothing but a prompt execution.

They kept her locked up in a little room for about an hour. Then four guards came and took her out. One of them was the tall Tyrolean. They led her silently along a tunnel which had a slight upward inclination.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked.

"To the castle of Erich Rothbart," replied the Tyrolean.

Janice tried to come to a stand-

still but they pulled her along with them.

"Where is my father?" she demanded.

"How should I know? Do you know where mine is?" said the Tyrolean.

"My father is the Count von Immerschoen," Janice informed him.

All the guards stopped. The Tyrolean looked at her in amazement and shook his head. "How do you do it?" he said. "First you sneak in here, which was impossible until you did it. Then you take over that machine and learn everything that's going on in the Council Chamber. Now your father is supposed to be Von Immerschoen!"

"What makes that seem so strange," she asked.

"Because his daughter was killed five years ago in a traffic accident in New York," replied the Tyrolean. "Besides that, Von Immerschoen was present when the Nameless Ones decided that they could use you by having you help keep Rothbart satisfied. You'd think that a father would complain about his own daughter's condemnation to a fate worse than death!" The other three guards winked at each other and guffawed.

Janice's face was pale. "The Count said nothing?" she queried.

"Nothing! Of course, he did look like he was going to puke, but he always looks that way." This was for the entertainment of the other three guards, who guffawed again.

As they marched along the tunnel toward Rothbart's subterranean lair, Janice found herself to be curiously

devoid of feelings, as though she had been stunned. Rejected by the "Cause." Rejected by Agartha. And now—rejected by her father!

The girls in Rothbart's harem were from all parts of the world. In addition to a too voluptuous *mulata* from Valparaiso there was an unusually exotic Egyptian girl, named Nezha, from Alexandria. There were blondes and brunettes and redheads, some tall and stately, from Scandinavia and Finland, others small and petite, from the more cosmopolitan centers of the Continent, such as Paris, Budapest, Berlin. One was even a kidnapped movie star from Hollywood, Amelia Rand, a gorgeous youngster only seventeen years of age, with sky blue eyes and soft, auburn hair. To look at her flawless youth was to realize the full magnitude of the criminality which the castle represented.

Most amazing of all was the social status and background of each. The least of them was Julia, the Chilean *mulata*, who was the educated daughter of one of Chile's most important producers of champagne. The Egyptian, Nezha, was the daughter of a fabulously wealthy Mohammedan rice and cotton merchant.

It was only a week after Janice's arrival. She, like the rest of the girls, had been "standardized." Scented baths, ultra violet ray treatments, beauty makeup, and an extravagant but embarrassing negligee. There was nothing else available to wear. Much to her disliking, the whole effect was to make her fairly

glow with irresistibility. In accordance with regulations, they all ate at the great, medieval style banquet table on the top floor, adjacent to the huge reception hall. They were seated at the table, eating and conversing, when a sudden commotion was heard in the hall. They heard servants running and orders shouted, while they all looked tensely at one another.

"Well!" said Ingaborg, the tall Norwegian who had eyes like a Nordic fjord and a pair of lips that even a woman had to admire, plus long braids of hair that looked like polished white gold. "Our lord and master has returned!" She belonged to an aristocratic family in Oslo and had come to Berlin as a singing student to study Wagnerian opera. She would have made a refreshing Brunhilde. All the girls looked up to her because they knew Rothbart was somewhat in awe of her. "Look your worst, girls," she advised, wryly. "Here he comes!"

Rothbart strode into the room with the red lining of his cloak swirling in his wake like a destroying flame. He came to a dead stop directly in front of Janice and gloated over her thinly clad form. But most of all he was delighted by what he saw in her face.

"Fräulein von Immerschoen!" he exclaimed, with a resonant, deeply masculine voice. "How delighted I am to welcome you as my thirteenth wife!"

"You never had a wife and never will," Janice retorted, with a hateful defiance in her voice which competed

with Ingaborg's.

Rothbart's thin brows went up in some surprise, but he was elated. He grasped her chin roughly in his large, artistic hand and laughed in her face.

"Wonderful!" he shouted. "*Pride!* That's what I like!" And then he sneered. "I like to peel it off, layer by layer, until nothing is left but a cowering, groveling female! Ha! What right have *you* to pride? Your father thinks he is my brain, yet he could not exert his influence enough to keep you from me! That's what I'm going to *love* about you! Every tear or scream for mercy I squeeze out of you will be dedicated to your so wonderful, putrid father!"

Janice could not restrain the powerful slap she gave Rothbart. It was a slap that resounded like a fire cracker and left a very red welt on his face. The other girls present only drew in their breaths and turned pale. Janice's extensive training in abnormal psychology told her that there was no good in the white that was showing around the pupils of Rothbart's eyes or in the faint gloss of spittle that was gathering at the corners of his mouth as he stood there rigidly, recovering from that stinging slap.

Janice ran like a gazelle for the hall. She knew by the sounds behind her that Rothbart was after her. She looked back once and saw Ingaborg and a slim brunette from Paris trip him. But this only increased his rage. Janice ran for a tunnel entrance that she knew led to the main elevator, but in a flash he was in

front of her, blocking her path. The other girls were crowded at the banquet hall entrance, most of them terrified into immobility, half of them screaming at her to run. Ingaborg and Nezha, the Egyptian, were in the hall, hoping in some way to run interference for her. She appreciated that. It gave her courage.

She ducked and dodged and ran for the sweeping stairway, but his long legs had her at a disadvantage. He was there before her again, on the stairs glaring down at her. His hand collided with the hilt of a rapier on the wall. Grinning wildly, he drew it from its long scabbard and came at her with it, amidst a crescendo of screams from the girls.

But a slight ray of hope came to Janice when she saw the companion of that rapier on the wall. She had not won the Olympic championship in fencing for nothing. She knew she had an advantage over Rothbart because of her training, even if he was taller and far stronger than she.

As she ran from him, she cried out to Ingaborg, who was on the stairway, "Throw me the other sword!"

Ingaborg lost no time in doing so, even though Rothbart tried to prevent it. He lunged at her with his sword and she went down with a nasty gash in her white shoulder. But he did not have time to make a *coup de grace*, because Janice came near to impaling him. Expertly, he ducked and parried her thrust and then charged her. Those girls present who were not trying to help Ingaborg would never forget the sight of a beautiful young woman in a filmy,

blue negligee dueling with a giant of a man with a red cape, in the vast reception hall of that medieval castle. Janice was faster and slightly more expert with the blade and Rothbart knew it. When she began to corner him, several guards came running in from the tunnel and pinned her arms behind her.

Rothbart advanced to kill her then. He was making insane, guttural grunts and half screams and was swinging his rapier for her.

The bell rang louder. *In her skull!* Janice screamed at the top of her lungs, "*Agarthi!*"

There was no time to do anything else than think at the monster who was almost on top of her. *Sleep, you poor, horrible, mad beast! Sleep—die!*

The madman came to a sudden halt and stopped his hideous shrieking. He emitted a curious little whine, like a puppy. Then he fell flat on his face at her feet. The hands of the guards relaxed and they, too, slumped down unconscious.

In the midst of muffled exclamations of relief and amazement, the girls sprang to her. She motioned for them to follow her quickly.

There was no time for conversation. She merely led them out. When they got to the gate, itself, the guard was nowhere in evidence. They found the garage with its limousines.

Janice assigned the big, powerful cars to the girls who could drive. There were five chauffeurs. The other girls piled in beside them. Janice's car was a Messerschmidt with auxiliary rocket drive for highway cruis-

ing. So was Ingaborg's. They harbored a faint hope that if they could reach a good main highway on the surface they would be able to turn on the jets and head for Holland. There were few surface vehicles, if any, that could overtake these special deluxe Messerschmidts, of which there was a very limited number in existence.

With a deep rumbling of high compression engines, the scintillating cars began to roll down the tunnel. In Janice's car were Beatrice of Mallorca and Nezha of Alexandria, both of them beside her in the spacious front seat. With Ingaborg went Amelia and Julia. Three more girls came in the third car, a big Duesenberg of special design, driven by Yvonne, the brunette from Paris. Tanya, the Yugoslav drove the fourth, a huge Lincoln V-24, accompanied by a red-headed girl from Helsinki. The last car, a Douglas Meteor, was driven by a blue-eyed Irish girl named Margaret Hagan, whose companion was a sandy-haired, tomboy type of a girl by the name of Judy Campbell, from New Zealand. A great number of people would have been somewhat astounded at the sight of two Messerschmidts, a Duesenberg, a Lincoln V-24, and a Douglas Meteor, carrying thirteen beautiful girls in scandalous negligees swiftly down a tunnel thousands of feet beneath the streets of Berlin.

Herman Richter, of the Technical Corps, was certainly astounded at this spectacular procession. He happened to be experimenting with the penetroviziray above the Council

Chamber and had the beginning of the long exit tunnel squarely focussed on his screen when Janice's car appeared, followed by the rest. Not caring to take time out for guessing the reason for such an apparition, he immediately sent a telepathic signal to a place where one of the Nameless Ones was always located . . .

So it was that when Janice finally reached the ramp that led toward the surface she found her road blocked by several other cars parked sideways. There had hastily gathered a handful of guards who now stood in front of the parked cars with radium pistols in their hands. Janice could have dashed away to her right, *down* the ramp, but she knew that the cars following her would be shot up or captured. So she stopped abruptly before the guards and concentrated on them. To the amazement of Beatrice and Nezha, the guards closed their eyes and fell to the ground.

"Get their pistols!" Janice told the girls.

The other two jumped out and picked up four of the powerful weapons just as Ingaborg skidded to a stop behind them. Nezha tossed her two guns into Ingaborg's car and said, "Follow Janice!" Then she climbed in beside Beatrice in the lead car.

Janice, not quite sure of her strategy now, turned right and headed *down* the ramp. She knew by what she had learned that she was heading toward a dim, lost world, in fact, the deserted caverns of Hell. But it was the only passage left open to

her. Ingaborg followed her in blind faith. There was nothing else to do.

Now that they had been discovered there was additional reason for haste. Janice knew that word would be sent ahead to block them. She gripped the steering wheel and stepped on the gas. The Messerschmidt leapt forward like an express train. . . .

Experimental headquarters of the German Army's Technical Corps had been newly located approximately ten thousand feet underneath Potsdam, not far from Berlin. The cavern was a thousand feet long and rather narrow, almost tunnel-like in its aspect, but this shape lent itself admirably to large scale laboratory work. On both sides of the cavern, long benches were lined up on which there was a great variety of small and large bench tools and instruments. Huge power lathes and milling machines turned industriously under fluorescent lights, between benches. At other places, master machinists and jewelers worked hand in hand with some of the world's best electro-physicists over tiny jewelers' lathes and radiotronic devices. Down the ceiling ran the rails of a huge crane, but most spectacular of all was a battery of thirty teletransporters which were lined up against the wall at one end of the cave. In front of them, on a raised platform, was an extra teletransporter, like a robot lieutenant in front of a platoon of robot soldiers.

Here was Dr. Gerhardt Eidemann, one of the greatest scientific geniuses of his time, bald headed and myopic,

with thick glasses and a black Van Dyke, eagerly placing a young pig in the raised teletransporter. Beside him stood three of the Nameless Ones, who had come here specifically to witness this experiment which represented the most significant of all of Eidemann's contributions to the Cause.

"Ordinary transference," he was explaining to them, "from the sender to the receiver, is a relatively easy matter. But when we go into multiple reception, thus duplicating the object sent, the result is an attenuation followed immediately by death and dissolution. I will show you what I mean."

With the pig securely imprisoned in the transparent sending chamber, he signalled to his technicians at a nearby control panel. The Nameless Ones merely observed without any sign of an expression on their faces. The pig, they saw, suddenly blurred and disappeared.

"Look at the receivers," said Eidemann, wiping the sweat of nervous tension from his egg-bald scalp. He peered through his thick glasses at the thirty teletransporters which were all set to receive the pig simultaneously.

In the thirty receiving chambers, thirty ghostly pigs took shape. Then, as suddenly as they had appeared, they collapsed into little messy pools on the floors of the chambers.

"Too much attenuation," explained Eidemann. "Understand, of course, the subject sent will survive a certain amount, if we condition the chambers by greatly reducing the air

pressure. But the life span is reduced proportionately."

"We already know all that," said one of the Nameless Ones, impatiently. "But now let's see the real Doppelgänger experiment!"

"Very well," Eidelmann replied, admitting a second pig into the sender. There was a note of pride in his voice, and justifiably so, because the Doppelgänger experiment was an improvement on ordinary teletransportation—an improvement on something which a superior race of beings had conceived of fifty or a hundred thousand years before his time.

"This time a tributary ray is fed into the main transference beam, transmitted by a separate teletransporter in another cave. The sum total of chemical substances which compose a pig's body has been increased twenty-nine times and placed in the other sender. These chemicals are reduced by energizing, like the pig, on the well known principle of the Einstein equation, into a regular transference beam and fed into the main beam before it gets to my multiple divider which breaks it into thirty separate beams, one for each receiver. Hence, the beam that is laden with the energy equivalents of the chemical components is also equally divided. The resultant received object is a live pig which is *not* attenuated!" Eidelmann's magnified eyes beamed grotesquely behind his lenses as he added the punch line. "In other words, I *create*—out of the 'clay'—twenty-nine extra pigs! Observe!"

Again he signalled to his assistants and they fell to work. Again the pig

in the sending chamber blurred and disappeared. But in the thirty receivers a miracle occurred. Fully thirty live and solid pigs materialized!

"A secondary purpose of this experiment," said Eidelmann, "is to provide food for the army which you want to produce. This is a method of doing it, although I must warn you that there is actually nothing miraculous under the stars, and that the effect you see is the result of causes which in no way represent a violation of the fundamental laws of Nature. I am trying to point out that in Nature no *thing* is gotten for *nothing*. To reproduce the extra pigs we had to expend a lot of effort to accumulate the substances of which they are composed. In ordinary Nature this requires stock raising equipment, a lot of food and water and care and patience and months of development. What you have just witnessed represents a very speedy method of reproducing food."

"Very interesting," commented the Nameless One who was the spokesman for the other two. "But when will you have the necessary materials accumulated to reproduce *men* in the same fashion? We need a vast, secret army in a very short space of time. There are at present two million regulars in the German Army. We propose to multiply every man by your method, thus making sixty million, together with their portable weapons and food. You have most of the formulas worked out covering the components of everything to be reproduced, the sources of these com-

ponents are mostly all within German territory, and they are even now being gathered, at an increasing speed. More teletransporters are being made available. Within three months you must be set up to start marching the entire army through the senders so that the true Doppelgänger will be produced. You must produce a force which cannot be decimated."

Dr. Eidelmann looked somewhat conscience stricken. "I—failed to mention one thing," he said, looking almost guiltily from one Nameless One to the other.

"What is that?" said the spokesman, coldly. The other two gave him a baleful stare.

"There is one substance, if we may call it that, which we cannot duplicate," replied Eidelmann. "In the human subject received it may be necessarily greatly attenuated. It is my theory that in the case of the teletransportation of men through my multiple divider it will make a basic difference in them."

"What is the missing substance?" demanded the Nameless One.

"Some people call it—the soul," replied Eidelmann. "The men who go through the senders will never be themselves again. They will lose a positive identity to become automations!"

"So much the better," replied the Nameless One.

All of a sudden, he and his two companions looked at each other, questioningly, as though they were listening to a strange sound. Eidelmann was about to speak to them

when they raised their hands for silence. Then the spokesman turned to him quickly.

"We have just received a communication that a very important enemy agent and a group of companions have escaped from Rothbart's castle and are headed this way in five of Rothbart's cars. They are to be stopped at all costs. Contact Major Blau at once and tell him to use all the means at his command to stop them. The leader of this group, a girl, is an agent of Agarthi!"

"*Agarthi!*" exclaimed Eidelmann, incredulously.

"Yes, Agarthi. You may appreciate now, Doktor, the necessity for haste in your work. Agarthi is beginning to move against us!"

As Janice made a long, screeching turn on a gradually spiralling ramp, there came into her head through the Agarthian mechanism a word of warning. She was told to slow to a stop and ask all her companions in the other cars to get into hers.

When she told the other girls to do so, they wanted to question her, but she said, "This place is all a mystery to you. I haven't got time to tell you about it. But I know far more about it than you do. I can't guarantee that we'll ever come out of here alive, but with me you'll have a better chance than you would by yourselves."

"You lead the way, Janice," said Ingaborg, calmly. "I'm with you to the finish!"

And the other girls expressed, in various languages, the same idea.

"Then hold on tight," she said. "Here go the rockets!"

The voice in her head had told her to do this. She got up momentum in the now heavily laden Messerschmidt and at a very high speed, switched on the rockets. The big car belched flame from six jet tubes in the rear and soon lurched ahead with a terrible new velocity. The tunnel was straight in this stretch. Also, it was lighted.

The guards at station 157 would never forget the very brief glimpse they caught on their visiscreen of that flaming rocket car laden with thirteen indescribable beauties as it hurtled at two hundred miles an hour down the tunnel toward unexplored territory. They caught the car directly in their paralysis beam, hoping that the driver's feet and hands would fall limply off the controls. With the traction beams they tried to bring the car to a halt, but with the added weight of the thirteen girls there was just enough extra inertia to make the task problematical. The power units of the traction beam generators groaned under the strain and even threatened to blow up, but the plunging Messerschmidt struggled onward and finally got out of effective range. They had escaped, even though they had been paralyzed! But then the operators received the surprise of their lives. In their visiscreens they saw that the coppery headed beauty who had been driving *was still doing the driving!* Her companions lay as though asleep about her but she still clung grimly to that wheel, her eyes wide and star-

ing, like one who drives in a trance.

"A witch!" muttered one operator. The others looked wonderingly at him. He was right! This was something unexplainable. A witch was driving straight into the belly of what was left of Hell!

Janice and the girls had quickly recuperated from their paralysis, and she had shut off the rocket drive of the Messerschmidt. She knew she had been unconscious and yet that she had, under guidance, managed to hold the car in the center of the tunnel. Again she could thank Agarthi for her escape. At first she wondered if it were possible to get to Agarthi, somehow, through the tunnel, but immediately she became aware of the problem of food and water, among other problems. It appeared that their only recourse was to find a way back to the surface as quickly as possible. That was her idea until they struck a pile of debris when traveling about forty miles per hour. Three tires blew out and the radiator was smashed beyond repair after a screeching tussle with the wall of the tunnel.

So they began to walk.

Ingaborg saw them first. They were marching behind a curious machine which was rolling along on large, broad-rimmed wheels. In the machine were materials, food, water and equipment. On top of it was mounted a formidable looking ray generator of some sort. There were about five hundred people. And behind them rolled more of the machines. The men were very tall and

powerful looking and they wore medieval type leather clothes and skirts of chain mail. The women were very good looking and were also dressed in a medieval type of clothing.

"How can we meet them like this?" asked Beatrice.

Janice looked at the sorry tatters of the girl's negligee. "It's true that your assets are showing," she smiled.

That brought all the girls to the realization that they were by now half naked. Like sheep in a gathering storm, the girls huddled together to hide. But Ingaborg and Janice, who were just as much at a disadvantage as the rest of them, declared that they would walk out to meet the strangers. Then the others said they would back them up.

So it was that Charles of Ravenoe and his clan were suddenly confronted by thirteen maidens as fair and scantily clad as any red blooded man might ever hope to see. Some were blushing with shame and kept their eyes, like proper damsels, to the ground. Others, of higher birth still, perhaps, looked him straight in the eye. Especially the two out in front—the coppery haired one with the fiery, blue-green eyes, and the statuesque Viking woman with the hair of white gold and the eyes like long forgotten Nordic lakes.

"The Saints of Heaven preserve us!" said Charles, as his merry brown eyes joined his lips in a cheery smile. "Whence come ye damsels, or are ye nymphs sprung out of heathen soil to haunt us good Christians?" Behind

Charles crowded his wife and seven sons and three daughters, plus an eager group of other smiling young men. They had all come to a stop now and were facing each other.

"We are from the surface world," said Janice. "We have had to run for our lives to escape German soldiers who sought to capture us. We are lost and hungry and rather helpless. Can you tell us how to return to the surface?"

"Ho ho!" said Charles. "So the huns are even after chasing women, are they now! The scoundrels! May God come soon to the aid of Agarthi!"

Janice and all the other girls raised their brows in astonishment.

"What do you know of Agarthi, or the Germans, for that matter?" asked Janice.

Charles of Ravenoe now raised his brows and chuckled. "What do we *know* about Agarthi? My dear, we are in the *service* of Agarthi now. We are en route to a great rendezvous. Soon there will join us a superior force, and they in turn may bring a great colony of theirs to Earth from another world to help us in this final struggle against the enemies of truth and honor. We carry disintegrating rays, heat rays and visirays as well as long distance electronophones. Did you think we were but ignorant pilgrims?"

Janice found it hard to believe her ears, but she wanted to more than anything else in life. "Do you mean to say," she said, "that there exists an Agarthian rendezvous now, where their forces are being gathered at the

present moment?"

"Charles of Ravenoe does not speak but to prattle," said the tall leader.

Janice looked suddenly very humble and very anxious, all at the same time. "May we join you?" she asked, simply.

Charles of Ravenoe looked the girls over with an approving smile. Then he looked back at the group of handsome warriors. They were all intelligent looking fellows, mostly blond and blue-eyed. And they were grinning broadly.

"Do I hear any objections to having these fair maids join forces with the clan of Ravenoe?" he asked.

No one said a word. The women smiled and looked away. The unmarried young men only grinned hopefully.

"You see," he said, turning to Janice and Ingaborg and the rest. "We do not waste words."

"Thank you," said Janice. "May I ask how it is that you can know what you do about the true history of Earth and still adhere to the Christian religion as you do? How can you reconcile the two?"

Again Charles of Ravenoe laughed. "That is easy!" he assured her. "We admit that ~~men~~ have misinterpreted the word of God and could not see the true history of the world written in the scriptures. We know that the Fallen Angels were the Gods who stayed on the Earth when the others migrated outward; we know that Hell was the result of disintegrant energy, which produced devils. But that does not place us in a position

to deny that Christ was the son of God, or that it is a virtue to follow in the footsteps of the Author of the Golden Rule! Our religion is simple, but it is reconciled to the facts, and it is *still* Christian!"

Janice's eyes were dimmed with emotion as she looked straight through broad Charles of Ravenoe at a brightening vision which she had come near to losing from heart and mind forever—Agarthi City, and a red headed fellow who loved a fight. There was hope, after all, even in spite of her father, the Schwalbenkorps, and the Nameless Ones. Good forces were gathering under the "Banner of the Sword." That was where she wanted most of all to be, in the middle of the fight and carrying one of those banners out to a better world where men *and* women—could really live someday according to the Golden Rule . . .

August 28, 1971. Chicago sprawled resignedly under the merciless glare of a summer sky. Lake Michigan hoarded any chance coolness it might have had in its muddy depths and the only breeze that was felt on Michigan Boulevard was that caused by the traffic.

This was Saturday afternoon and business offices were closing.

There was a strange type of holiday spirit in the air, as though a vaguely defined special occasion justified this early closing of offices and aimless wandering in the streets. It was, no doubt, a subconscious public reaction to the peculiar world situation.

The Chicago Tribune, like every major newspaper in the world, was as full of pros and cons as the Chicago Daily News—in fact, mostly it was full of cons:

London, 28 (UP)—At 10:00 A.M. this morning, London Time, the Prime Minister was visited formally by the Nepalese ambassador to England, Majarajmat Fajad Ramji, to be informed that Nepal had changed its name and that henceforth that mysterious and heretofore secluded country would be called Agarthi. It was further pointed out that the reason for this change was that Nepal had voluntarily accepted totalitarian rule by the government of Agarthi; itself, in consideration of the "intellectual, social and technological advantages to be gained." This move automatically establishes the very mysterious kingdom of Agarthi as a sovereign country with embassies and consulates in all the major countries of the world.

Although the prime minister of England refused to make a statement to the press, it was learned here from good sources that a subversive plan is working behind the move, and that Nepal has been victimized by what is being termed the "crack-brained" fanatics of Agarthi, who, as Larry Rowe, spokesman for the British Socialist Party, put it, "are blowing pretty bubbles into the air . . ."

Chicago, 28 (AP)—The government of the United States of America received official notification today from representatives of the newly named government of Agarthi (until this morning known as Nepal) that on January 1, 1972, all governments of the world were to consider themselves officially under the rule and authority of their King and the Council of Agarthian Elders. The name given in the startling document to the system under which all peoples of the Earth were supposed to be guided after December 31 was simply *The Terrestrial Government*. As soon as the "Terrestrial Government comes into effect," all national governments are to continue "as will be necessary to the routine continuation of domestic and international commerce, ordinary management of the affairs of state, and general human welfare," but all international conferences relative to territorial agreements, balance of

power, alliances and military treaties, etc., are supposed to be suspended completely. Furthermore, each nation is supposed to elect one delegate to a universal conference starting February 1, 1972, to be held in Agarthi City before the King and the Council of Elders, the purpose of which "will be to outline the basic changes which will be required in order to set in motion the most rapid social evolution possible toward an effectual world government."

No reaction to this affront to the United States of America and to all nations of the world has as yet been registered officially at the Capitol, but filibustering California State congressman Tom Nichols was willing to say to the press, "No matter how thin you slice it, somebody is crazy!"

EDITORIAL BY J. J. L. KRUNK.—There are two events in the history of newspaper and magazine publicity which will always be remembered as outstanding hoaxes that really had the nation going while the effects lasted. One was the never to be forgotten scare in the old days during the "Flying Saucer" hoax.

However, the latest hoax, which was internationally televised, continues, much to the great depreciation of the prestige of its authors. This hoax was so well presented that it even succeeded in suspending the Great War, at least temporarily, and for this the Democratic nations have already expressed their gratitude. But now the hoax is going too far. It wants to rule us!

Reference is made to that unforgettable night of December 17, 1970, when we were all treated to an impressive speech by one Rama Khan Tor, supposedly an Elder God who had come to help Agarthi save the world from its folly. He told us that within one year Agarthi would take over. That night we were also treated to some expensive fireworks in several parts of the world, all of which must have cost several millions of dollars. Reports came in from everywhere that eyewitnesses had

seen the thunderbolts of the "Elder Gods" striking down from outer space at the armies who were attacking Agarthi and various cities in Europe. The peculiar disappearance of Reims and Aachen and several villages in a severe earthquake at that time was an unusual circumstance on which the authors of the hoax sought to capitalize by saying that the bolts had "disintegrated" them. So impressive was the clever spectacle, coupled as it was with the demoralizing disappearance of Nicholas the First of Russia, that our enemies at that time suspended their attacks and have since withdrawn, at least apparently so. But these are still very perilous times, and the price of American liberty will always be a strong American vigilance. We must always be quick to recognize a hoax when we see one, whiskers or no whiskers. If you do not think that this ultimatum of Agarthi to the nations of the world is a hoax, what do you suppose Agarthi could reply to this simple question—*YOU AND WHAT ARMY?*

Sorry not to be able to close on such a good punch line, but speaking of armies starts us to thinking. Ex-major Michael Kent, lately attached to the U. S. Army's Sixth Airforce, and pal of ex-captain Stephen Germain, lately of the U. S. Strategic Services, has been recruiting American volunteers for Agarthi. Not without success, we should add. Latest reports have it that some twenty thousand pilots and airmen in general, including many of Kent's own ex-commandos, have accepted free beers and transportation tickets to Nepal—oops!—Agarthi, as they have started calling it today.

We know that the laws of the United States stipulate that any citizen who enlists in a foreign army automatically loses his citizenship. That makes our

twenty thousand vets full blooded Agarthians, bless their souls! But may we ask—what of the author of their civic demise? What happens to the citizenship of the recruiter, Mr. Michael Kent? If he wants to be a foreigner, too, why does he persist in making a harvest on soil which is, by rights, no longer his own? What's wrong with his making recruits out of all the erstwhile Nepalese who became Agarthians today by royal decree? Our boys have been dragged away from home often and long enough. Why not do something about Michael Kent and keep our boys at home? Be it ever so humble, there is no place like home—without termites!

The boys down at *Pop's Roost* on North Clark Street were trying to drink beer, play Twenty Six, and come to a decision on world affairs, all at the same time. Peevy, the big fellow with a pock-marked face somewhat of the color of lead, usually had the last word, and as usual he was making most of the decisions.

"Dey oughtta be a law," he complained, sagely.

Little Tony Coletti widened his big eyes and replied, "I donna know, Peevy. I see dissa fellow giva da speech on da televize datta night, an' I tell a you he was a da goods! Maybe we needa to be all a straighten out by somebody like a dees keeng of Agarcia, or watta you call it. Gat reed of de *politicos* an' keep outta de war! I had a keed in de war." Tony's eyes got watery. "Dey gotta heem! Dey *keel* a heem! I vote a now for any fellow who can a use a hees brain before he usa da *bomba*!"

Sandy "Big Swede" Larson shoved

back his straw hat from a sunburned forehead and took an enormous swig of beer. "Aw, shut up, Tony!" he said. "This Agarathi stuff is just a big religious racket to make money. The nerve of those guys! They aren't just cracked. They wanta commit suicide, too!"

Peevy looked up from his dice at Sandy and there was trouble in his little, bloodshot eyes. "Don't tell Tony to shut up," he said. "He lost his kid in the war, didn't he? He's got a right t'talk!"

"I got a right to an opinion, ain't I?" bellowed Sandy. "I say this Agarathi stuff is the bunk and somebody oughtta string this guy Kent up to a lamp post!"

Peevy got to his feet and Tony ducked over to the bar. Pop, the proprietor, yelled in falsetto, "Outside now boys! This is a respectable place! No fighting!"

"I say shut up because you don't know what you're yappin' about!" said Peevy to Larson.

"And I say you're an ignorant bonehead!" replied the latter, also getting up.

And so it started, a brawl that traveled to the street and ended that night in the local precinct's "cooler."

But this was typical of the general situation. People were forming a lot of sharply opposed opinions and arguments originated at the drop of a hat. Out in Cicero some shots were fired over the issue and one of the contestants was killed.

Through all this the big New Capitol Building on Michigan Boulevard remained aloof and non-committal.

As the sun went down and a stifling summer night began to dominate the world, lights blinked on in the executive wing. The President and his special committees were working overtime . . .

Michael Kent started out early for the Airborne Veterans' banquet at the La Salle, where he had been invited to be the guest speaker. The banquet was scheduled for eight, but he had started out in a taxi at seven because he wanted to take a careful look at the place. Ever since he had gotten his left arm shriveled by a death ray in Santa Cruz, he had developed a precaution complex. He was a fighting man, and the mortification of not being able to fight anymore had made him squeamish about being taken at a disadvantage.

This night there were plenty of reasons for taking precautions. For one thing, the news was out about Agarathi. Public opinion was aroused against his recruiting activities. There might even be tar and feathering or lynching parties under way.

The vets were largely for him, because he talked their language and was a well known vet, himself, permanently scarred by the war. They were mostly young bloods who had not yet finished with adventure, and they believed in what he said. But this time he had let the cat out of the bag. He had announced only today that he was going to bowl them over with some heretofore unknown facts.

Evidently some of the Airborne Veterans had decided to come early, also, because when Kent sauntered

into the lobby of the La Salle, three of them came to welcome him. Tall, strong boys, alert and keen eyed, cut off from the war's adventure too soon, he thought to himself. These vets believed in what Kent advertised: Nationalism had served its time; Universalism was the next logical step, the only remaining defense against war and destruction. Agarathi could establish Universalism bloodlessly in a short length of time and start the groundwork for the building of a vast, Utopian world, but it needed a few willing hands—not for a war against civilization, but for a war against the last true enemies of peace and security and progress—the Nameless Ones and their huge cartel control groups.

Kent knew most of the local vets, but he did not recognize these three fellows. He shook hands, anyway, at the same time casually scanning the room for suspicious looking characters.

"We're from Council Bluffs," said one of the vets, a lean faced fellow with a scar on his left cheek that zig zagged like a bolt of lightning.

"And he," said the second vet, waving his thumb at vet number three, "is from a little oasis on the Nebraskan plains called—what was the name?" he queried of the third man.

"Don't tell me," smiled Kent. "He's from Omaha. When are your two towns ever going to quit feuding?"

By this time they had arrived at the hotel's oasis, which was the bar, and they all ensconced themselves in

a booth behind a table with a red morocco top. Drinks were ordered subconsciously and cigarettes blossomed leisurely out. Except for Kent. He stayed with his pipe.

This was a very nice approach, thought Kent, but his mind was not as slow as they figured. At first he had really taken them for vets, but now he was thinking differently. He was in the middle of what could be termed a trap. His sudden suspicions had caused him to use the gadget in his skull to read their minds, and the facts were quite clear. These were agents of the U. S. cartel control group, than which there were no killers with colder blood or greater perseverance.

However, he bided his time and still kept looking around the room as the conversation gradually drifted toward Agarathi and world government. He was very much surprised to recognize one chap at the bar who hid his face from him. That purple birthmark on the right ear was a dead give away, but aside from that Kent would have recognized his wiry, athletic frame and that wavy, sandy hair anywhere. Sam Turner, of the FBI, ex track champion, all around expert and instructor in the art of self-defense, from Judo to fencing. A good looking boy, and one of the top agents. Wherever he went, it was like the smoke that preceded a fire. Sure to be trouble.

But Kent really sat up straight in his seat when he saw the pudgy-faced, stockily built fellow who was playing cards behind a cigar over in the corner. Few would know him,

because he never allowed himself to be photographed, but Kent knew those heavily jeweled, fat looking fingers that could pop tennis balls, that shiny, wavy black hair and the predominantly Greek look about him. There was also enough Asiatic in him to slant his eyes slightly. Few would have suspected that he held the position he did, for he hid it well under an old world taciturnity and craftiness that was a heritage from seafaring ancestors in and about the Aegean. And there was enough German in him to make him stubborn. Greg "Baby Face" Stierman, one of the country's leading citizens and one of the most dangerous men alive to involve in an argument if you were playing for keeps. Hobbies: rare and beautiful jewels, one of the world's leading connoisseurs; chess, one of the master players; knife throwing, the deadliest thrower in the recorded history of the art, because he had studied it, and what he studied he perfected to an abnormal extreme. Such a versatile and peculiar man was the Chief of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, who seldom appeared in public.

To Kent, the presence of Turner and Stierman here together could mean only one thing. They must be out after the big time agents who had cornered him. It was a great consolation to have them so close at hand.

"Have some of the recruits actually become Golden Guardsmen yet?" queried the fellow with the lightning streak for a scar.

"Why don't you slickers tell me

what you really want and get it over with?" said Kent. "You're no more vets than I'm a bat-winged canary!"

"Scar Face" looked astounded and hurt. "What are you talking about?" he asked.

"What do you take me for?" retorted Kent. "A campfire girl? I've been around, boys! If only one of you had come from Council Bluffs or Omaha wearing a two hundred dollar suit and a penthouse shirt and tie I'd have taken the bait. But there are no three honest vets from a couple of midwest towns who can *all* afford the same expensive tastes. You're phonies, so confess your racket and let's get this over with. What do you want?"

The three of them looked significantly at each other and simultaneously extinguished their cigarettes in the same ashtray.

"Okay," said "Scar Face." "We want *you*. Our car is in the alley."

"Before we leave," said Kent, groping for strategy, "I want to tell you that I knew you'd look me up tonight. That's why I walked right into your little set up. I've got a message for your boss that's worth one million bucks." What he was really thinking about was how not to get a skull massage before he could take care of *them*. His plan was to get them into the alley and knock them out with the paralysis ray. He knew that the FBI would be on his heels, and he would be only too glad to turn over his charges to them, but he did not want the FBI to know about his special powers yet.

As they all got up to leave, with

no comment being made on his last statement, Kent saw with satisfaction that "Iron Man" Stierman was squinting through his halo of cigar smoke at Sam Turner. That was enough. They were "on."

When the alley was reached, the three agents grabbed him and got ready to knock him out, for easier handling. Two held his arms, and "Scar Face" stood in front of him warming up his knuckles as though he were enjoying his work. It was going to be a devastating haymaker on the button. Kent got so mad at the injustice of it that he almost forgot about the paralysis ray.

He was just about to use it when six big fellows stepped out of the darkness, some of them swinging blackjacks—at the three agents. "Scar Face" ducked and flashed a gun, but dropped it with a groan of pain as a knife "placked" through the bones of his hand and stuck there rigidly.

"We want this to be a quiet party," said Stierman, calmly taking the fellow's bloody hand and extracting his knife while an assistant began to apply handcuffs.

"Scar Face" aimed a foul blow at him, but Stierman met his leg with a bone breaking Judo blow, simultaneously raising his elbow sharply under the other's chin as it came howling down. This flipped his head violently upward, and Stierman threw a quick piledriver into his arching solar plexis, with one foot behind the other's feet. "Scar Face," broken, bleeding, and out, fell like

tall timber. And Stierman had not even disturbed the natty angle of the ruby stickpin in his tie. The other two agents had been taken care of from the first moment of attack by the FBI men.

"Much obliged, Stierman," said Kent.

"Much obliged, yourself," replied the FBI chief. "We want you, too, you know."

"Me!" said Kent. "What's the charge?"

"Suspicion—or you name it," sighed Stierman, standing quietly and immaculately near the light of a glazed bathroom window and polishing one of his jeweled rings. "The President wants to see you."

"In that case I'll be happy to go along, because as a matter of fact I—"

"In any case," said Stierman, pausing to glare at him, "*you'll go along.*"

Kent liked Stierman. A very thorough man. He would not have liked to use the paralysis ray on him. Besides, he wanted to see the President now more than he wanted to see the Airborne Vets . . .

The President of the United States was a tall, lanky man with a long, homely face and fire in his eyes. Some people called him the second "Abe," but he lacked Lincoln's deliberate slowness and calmness, as well as his inherent greatness. Still, he was a highly intelligent and energetic executive who would have preferred being guided by principles rather than by politics, if circumstances permitted.

"I think you're a good man," he

was saying to Kent in his private office in the executive wing of the Capitol, "and that's why I dislike seeing you hook your horse up to the wrong wagon. What makes you think that Agarthi could *possibly* presume to tell the whole world what to do?"

"That question," smiled Kent, "will be answered tomorrow."

"The President," said Stierman, who sat close beside him, "can't wait until tomorrow. He is a busy man. He wants an answer *now*."

Together with Stierman and Sam Turner there were two others in the room. Lieutenant Colonel George Henry Brion, new Chief of the O.S.S. Six feet two, big fisted, a box-like square face and black, curly hair, gray eyes, and one artificial leg which few people knew about. Then there was the man called "Little Willy," alias James William Grange, D.S., Ph.D., special technical aide attached to the O.S.S.

These four men, alone, had been secretly assigned by the President exclusively to the case of Agarthi. The President knew much more than what he read in the newspapers. He knew there was a great deal behind Agarthi, but he wanted to measure that "great deal" carefully before issuing any public statements. His opening derogatory remarks had been merely to egg Kent on.

"Well," said Kent, finally, "since I have the advantage of your undivided attention, Mr. President, I'd like to speak very clearly and frankly. You must realize that I know a lot of big inside facts which a lot of big people would like to keep un-

der cover. If there is anyone present who should not hear such *inside* facts, you had better advise them to go now, because this is going to be the Naked Truth."

"I anticipated such a discussion," said the President, who was doodling on his desk calendar in a strangely tense and preoccupied way. "The gentlemen present represent a Special Service group, directly attached to my office until further notice. You may speak your mind, Mr. Kent."

"Okay, then here it is. You know as well as I do that Agarthi is real and earnest, and that if any group of men in the world is capable of governing all nations it is the Agarthian Elders. I gave you my entire story six months ago and presented indisputable proofs to you about Agarthi, so let's not take time by questioning that point."

"Just a minute," interrupted Brion. "Mr. President, is it true that you have been presented with *indisputable* proof that Agarthi is what it pretends to be—a place of superior wisdom and science?"

Turner and Grange looked expectantly at the Chief Executive, while Stierman calmly lighted a cigar.

"Yes," said the President, unconditionally. "Go on, Mr. Kent." Brion and Turner and Grange now listened to Kent with highly aroused interest. Stierman's features were expressionless.

"You also know very well," continued Kent, "that nationalism has served its time, that this great new Age of Power calls urgently for the

next step in the evolution of human society — Universal Government — Mankind's last hope for survival. If such a universal improvement is not made quickly, you know it is inevitable that we will all be involved in more and more devastating wars. Even now the New Germany Party is starting on a Hitlerian course whose purpose is to conquer the world, as usual, and we're liable to have another war of Domination on our hands, this time backed up by weapons which were devised by the Elder Gods, themselves."

"Gentlemen," said the President, as Sam Turner opened his mouth to speak, "all this concerning Elder Gods is *true!* Mr. Kent has shown me physical proofs and given me televisual as well as *telepathic* evidence."

"Telepathic?" asked Stierman, raising his brows enough to look at his boss.

Yes, telepathed Kent to everybody in the room. Didn't you know it was possible?

"My God!" exclaimed Brion. Turner's mouth went agape. Stierman lay his cigar on his ashtray, leaned back in his chair attentively, and said, "You have the floor, Mr. Kent!"

"Now we come to the spectacular part," said Kent. "Mr. President, forgive me for dragging out of the closet of leading statesmen the world over a very nasty skeleton. You are all secret catspaws to international bosses who control the world's government and finance and politics as though they were gods. All political speeches during major election cam-

paigns sound about the same, and the results are about the same after a candidate to public office is elected, because before he ever starts, his course is prescribed as though by the hand of Fate, itself. These bosses are the sole dispensers of Power and Influence. The world is so well geared to obey their mandates that to upset the system would be cataclysmic. Still, that system must be upset. For as long as it continues there can never be such a thing as truth and honor among common men. Look at today's reaction to the news about Agarthi. Can't you see there the influence of the cartel bosses? They can't afford to let Agarthi win, because that means the end of self-centered Power and Influence in the world!"

"Again," said the President to the others present, "to avoid time consuming conversation I must tell you a fact which it will endanger your lives to know, but since danger is your business I'll inform you between these four, sound-proof walls. I am breaking a sort of unwritten "Aristotelean oath" of governing executives the world over and am also taking my own life in my hands to confess it. But the fact is, gentlemen, all presidents and kings and dictators, except for a few renegades like Nicholas the First, are subject to the orders of higher rulers, gangster type bosses of the super cartel combines that own and control all things, directly or indirectly. They hold the strings of Power and Influence and must be obeyed. Since they own the *owners* of the press and radio and

television and motion pictures and all such tools which are utilized for the shaping of public opinion, they can shape the public mind and make it believe anything that is convenient to their plans. Before the days of printing presses and all the other modern day devices, they had other systems which were fully as subtle and effective. They have always ruled the rulers down through history, but much more successfully, or I should say on a much grander scale, since the advent of capitalism and the machine age." The President leaned forward, very earnestly. "What you gentlemen were led to believe was going to be a little cross-examination of our friend, Mr. Kent, has become, therefore, a desperate conference of brave men who must wonder if they are not on the threshold of attempting something unprecedented in the annals of political history—the throwing off of the yoke of these Men of Power and the opening of the eyes and minds and hearts of all Mankind to this naked truth, so that the simple human faith of a man in his fellow man will henceforth prove to be a working proposition, so that leaders and thinkers can truly *lead!*"

Grange, Turner, Brion and Stierman had never seen the President get so worked up about anything before. He was tense, dramatic, and in a rage. His fist even crashed on the desk.

"Gentlemen, I tell you that if the presidents and kings and prime ministers of all governments were released from the power of these international bosses the world's problems

would be solved in six months!" He looked at them all fiercely and gave them a bitter smile. "Did you really think it was a *problem* to avoid wars and famine and ignorance and human suffering? It is *true* what has so often been said, that a *child* could find the answers! But what always complicated things was the eternal chess game played by these mighty ones who must always hedge for advantage and power, so that they can offer the bait to those who will forever be willing to buy that power and influence with their very souls! I refer you to the case of Abraham Lincoln, one among many which could be mentioned. His great work of Emancipation was his own desire. He resisted the Control factions, but he had to tear the country apart to do it. And although his great spirit brought him success, he was quickly assassinated, which is the fate of all leaders who resist the 'system.'" The President pointed at Kent. "What I called Mr. Kent here for was to find out one thing once and for all. This may amaze you, gentlemen, but I have reached a certain desperate decision. What I have said here to you tonight and what I could say still further would mean my assassination within a half hour of making it public. Now look here. I am a statesman and regrettably but necessarily a politician. But before all else I consider Mankind. It is far more important to me than the antiquated tradition of nationalism when it comes down to a matter of choosing between *survival* of the two. I am convinced that Universalism is the

next step. Presidents before me should have led the way years ago and boldly opened the discussion of a world constitution with the members of the U.N. when that organization was first established—and before it perished. If this had been done in time we would never have seen a Russian-made War of Domination. Now I occupy the same position in the world as those previous presidents. I am no better than they. I am as enmeshed as my predecessors in this secret system of political servitude to the international bosses. But I do see clearly that the only thing that will cleanse this foul disease from the body of all humankind is for one man such as myself to be willing to die for his convictions and, once and for all, *place principle before politics!*" His eyes blazed. "Therefore, gentlemen, if Mr. Kent is able to give me proof that Agartha can back up its claims to the limit, I'll take my stand before Congress and before the world, and I'll tell them exactly what I have told you—the Naked Truth. And I'll be the first to recommend a world wide acceptance of Universalism under the Agarthian plan—though it cost me my life!

"Mr. Kent," said the President, gently, as Kent sat there silently staring at him, "your pipe has gone out."

Kent stood up and stretched his legs and sauntered very happily over to a position beside the President, and then turned and looked at the others.

"I have good news," he said, as

calmly as possible.

The President and everybody else looked at him wonderingly.

"First of all," he said, "the system of the international bosses is breaking down. Mr. President, please explain to the gentlemen present who Peter Trimble is."

"*Peter Trimble!*" the President gasped, both fearfully and hopefully. "Why he's the top boss of all the U. S. cartel combines! The name he goes by in public is James Sylvester Addison, President of United Aluminum." Brion and Stierman's eyes widened. "He reports directly to the Berlin Control Council."

"Use the past tense there," corrected Kent, watching the other men closely. "He is now a prisoner in Agartha, along with Antonio Velarde, the Latin American boss, and before another day goes by we hope to have Lord Mercyfield by the coat tails. He, as you may or may not know, is the boss man of the British Empire combines. We have full, recorded evidence against all these men, as well as against the remainder of the world bosses."

"My God!" exclaimed the President. "How is it possible!"

"Trade secrets," grinned Kent.

Stierman was now beginning to take a deep interest in the developments. For the first time he was beginning to be sincerely impressed with Kent. Still, he had a question.

"If Trimble was the boss," he said, "and if he has been removed from power, why are the newspapers still playing his game and telling lies?"

"Inertia," said Kent. "It will take

time before people realize that they can be truthful and actually get away with it."

"But they'll select other bosses faster than you can close in on them!" said the President.

"You say *they*," said Kent as he puffed quietly on his pipe. "Whom do you mean?"

The President looked as though he were at a loss for words. "You explain that one for me, will you, Kent?"

"All right." Kent addressed the other men. "Underneath Berlin is a group of six men who are called the Nameless Ones. They have unusual powers and they are the lords and masters of these international bosses. In short, they *run* the world. They are the sole authors of the New Germany movement. They are even now placing Elder God machines and weapons in preparation for a mass assault on the world and Agarthi as well."

"It looks," said Stierman, "as though Agarthi were trying to buck up against a two-headed hydra. But may I ask a pertinent question here? *Where are Agarthi's big teeth?* Where is the strong right arm, the controlling force that is going to out-balance all the current military power of the world? I'm practical, like most people. All I can understand, let us say for the sake of argument, is *power*. Where is it?"

Again Kent smiled. "That," he said, you will see tomorrow at noon, and so will London and Paris and Moscow and Rome and Buenos Aires and Tokyo and Shanghai and a few

other capitals."

The President tugged at the sleeve of Kent's withered left arm. "Don't be difficult," he said. "*What* will we see tomorrow at noon?"

"Gentlemen," replied Kent, highly elated, "you will see some giant battleships floating in the air above Lake Michigan. *Space ships!* Ships that can carry emigrants in suspended animation a hundred years through interstellar space in search of other worlds on which to live, ships that could take you to Mars and back in ten days, powerful dreadnaughts that could overwhelm any major navy, army or airforce in the world, single handed, and never get scratched! The Agarthians built them on the patterns of the actually existent Elder God space ships of fifty thousand years ago, which still lie in their docks in the lower caverns of Agarthi."

"My God!" exclaimed Brion. "It sounds like a Martian invasion!"

Sam Turner scratched his purple ear and shook his yellow topped head. "I don't get it," he said. "Too much for me! I'll just wait until tomorrow."

"Mr. President," said Kent, "the purpose of this visit by a portion of the Agarthian space navy is to answer the very question which Mr. Stierman has stated: *Where are Agarthi's big teeth?* I have been requested by Agarthi to ask for your cooperation in this matter."

"Now I'll be glad to cooperate," replied the President, "but how?"

"By taking a belligerent attitude and ordering us out of the United

States on the grounds that our presence without the government's permission is illegal. Nobody will get hurt. The ships will merely remain silent and uncommunicative for several hours, during which time the anti-aircraft units of the local garrisons, and the U. S. Army Airforce, should be called out in the greatest strength possible to attack the ships. Attack them with all the live ammunition you want, because you can't hit them no matter what you do.

"After several hours of witnessing such fireworks, the ships will move closer to Chicago, and then Stephen Germain will address the entire United States from the leadship, over a powerful transmitter on board."

"Germain!" exclaimed the President. "So he is returning at last!"

"Yes. He will explain to everybody the entire social platform of the King of the World. After he finishes what he has to say, you will be invited on board, and there you'll have your chance to tell the truth to the nation—and nothing but the truth. If you were to speak on regular television hookups you'd be cut off before you got started and somebody would make the lame excuse about technical difficulties beyond their control, and you'd be taken suddenly 'ill' and nobody would get to hear you finish. But on board an Agar-thian battle cruiser you'll be protected and you won't be cut off."

The President sprang to his feet. He extended his hand to Kent, while his face beamed with the inspiration of a lifetime dream. "I'll take you up on that!" he said.

The other men in the room were too dazed and amazed to get to their feet.

Kent was awakened by the sound of shouting. It was nearly noon. He rolled over on his back and lay in bed listening as the sun crept in through his open window along with a welcome breeze from the lake. It was one man shouting, down on the street, and Kent could hear his words.

"We have had enough of deception!" he was shouting. "This traitor, Michael Kent, who has come like a malicious pied piper into our midst to lure our young veterans away from their homes again, should and must be driven out!"

Kent hurriedly put on his clothes and went outside. He saw a huge crowd of several hundred people listening to a raving soap box artist.

Kent walked slowly toward the wild-eyed men that formed the vanguard of the crowd, keeping his mind clearly aware of the paralysis ray, the operation of which was a matter of the will. He stopped, practically in their midst, and raised his good arm for silence.

"Friends, listen to me!" he shouted.

A warning flashed into his brain, but it was too late. A big rock came flying and hit his head.

"Traitor!" somebody yelled at him.

And they all grabbed him. He was too dizzy with pain to defend himself. Brutal hands tore at him. His clothing was ripped and he was lifted bodily into the air.

"Give it to him good!" shouted the crowd. "The dirty stinker! We don't want foreigners or traitors! Let's ride him clear out of the state on a rail!"

Kent tried to grin through a swollen eye and a bleeding lip.

"When traitors are accused," he said, "they are given a chance to say a word in their own defense. How about it?"

"Shut his big mouth!" somebody shouted.

"Give him his last word!" someone else argued.

"Okay! The last word he'll ever speak in *America*!" cried another.

So Kent got up and shouted, "I plead guilty of the crime—if crime it is—of fighting for universal welfare!"

"*Boo!*" retorted the crowd instantly.

"None of that Agarthi baloney!" cried a ringsider close at hand. "That's fake!"

"*Fake! Fake! Fake!*" boomed the crowd.

Kent raised his good right hand and gained a loophole in the din. He had looked at his watch a second before—one of the few things which had, miraculously, remained on him.

"In twenty minutes," he shouted, "I can give you proof about Agarthi—proof that you'll never forget to your dying day!" The crowd began going bug-eyed and shushing itself to hear him. "You have all day to beat me to a pulp if that's the kind of sport you like, but all I'm asking for is twenty minutes in which to prove beyond any shadow of a doubt

that I am right and that all of you have been shamefully deceived by the newspapers you read! Just twenty minutes!"

The crowd was stumped. But it finally broke loose again.

"Dunk him in the lake!" they cried.

"No!" shouted a fellow with a beer belly. Give him his twenty minutes and then we'll let him *really have it!*"

"Okay! Twenty minutes! Set your watches, boys!"

Kent showed his watch to "Beer Belly," and from that the time was given to everybody. The crowd got very quiet and waited. Kent sat exhausted on the wagon and watched them.

If they got premature and tried to injure him he was going to use the paralysis ray. Suddenly very much aware of the mechanism in his head, he sent out a telepathic call to Stephen Germain, who by now should have been descending out of space into the Earth's atmosphere far above him, he reasoned.

Germain! he telepathed. *How soon will you arrive?*

And Germain answered back, *Promptly at twelve, Slim, old boy! Keep your shirt on! We're just slicing the Kenniston-Heavyside layer.*

My shirt's gone off my back, he sent back, so I can't keep it on. I'm in a pickle, or rather I'm about to be a pickle. I'm sitting out here in public disgrace and disarray, with about fifteen minutes of grace to spare. If you don't speed it up I'll have to start paralyzing some people, and I'm liable to get shot for it.

Germain's thought delayed for a moment. Then: *We'll take care of you quickly. Where are you?*

In front of the Lake Shore Manor.

Be right down. We are shielding you against the sleep ray, so you know what to expect. We have you here now in the visiscreen. Jumpin' catfish! They really mugged you up! Hold tight! We're coming in!

Slightly before twelve o'clock noon the people of Chicago and especially the people on Michigan Boulevard, saw a huge, submarine shaped vessel appear in the sky and descend rapidly toward the ground. A second vessel appeared, and a third, but these latter remained aloft, hovering silently over the lake at an altitude of about five thousand feet.

As the first vessel dashed ponderously downward toward the Lake Shore the huge crowd there began to disperse in hysterical confusion. But before they could trample each other seriously they all slowed to a standstill and looked in awe at the sky. With their mouths agape in astonishment, they slumped to the ground with hardly a murmur. Thousands of people were lying about everywhere, and at first the spectators on the outskirts of the crowd thought that the invaders had mercilessly killed them in some manner, but it was soon determined that they were merely enjoying a deep and peaceful sleep.

The bedraggled figure of Michael Kent looked very lonely and forlorn as the shadow of the descending ship engulfed him. He alone was not

sleeping. He was on his feet and looking upward. Spectators from the Manor House saw the ship come to a stop only twenty feet above the lamp posts.

Immediately, a small door opened in the belly of the ship and a sort of square, telescoping shaft extended itself down to the ground. No crude rope ladder for Kent; this was an elevator! He got in it and a cage was seen to rise in the shaft. When it had entered the ship, the shaft telescoped back into the ship's belly. Then the huge vessel began to rise again, and it finally joined its two companions in the sky over Lake Michigan. No wings, propellers or rocket tubes were seen on these ships, nor did they make any sound that could be heard below. They just hung there silently and nothing more occurred except that the people who had fallen asleep began to wake up and look sheepishly at each other. They looked up at the ships, which they could not doubt were from Agarathi, and then they looked still more sheepish. *So Kent was right!*

Gradually, two and two began to be put together. Those miraculous ships could only mean that the whole story was *true*—Rama Khan Tor, the Elder God who had spoken to the world on December 17, 1970 over an international television broadcast from his great ship at Agarathi had been real all the time!

Now the pendulum of public opinion began to swing the other way. "We have been deceived!" they shouted by the thousands, and they

crowded the beaches to watch in wonderment the silent and motionless ships out there above the lake. This was an event which they, and the hot dog and ice cream vendors, would never forget.

By one o'clock, papers appearing in special editions on the streets and special radio-television announcements informed the public that the United States Government had established television communication with the Agarthians and had advised them that their presence was illegal, as no permission had been granted to enter U. S. skies in vessels that were obviously equipped for combat. An ultimatum was given that if by three P.M. they were not gone they would be openly attacked by the combined ground, sea and air forces of the U. S. Army and Navy.

The Agarthians, however, remained where they were . . .

National Guards and the Army regulars worked swiftly to clear the beaches, but the spectators took to the rooftops. Anti-aircraft batteries were set up on the beaches, and several proud cruisers appeared ominously on the lake, their anti-aircraft guns poited aloft.

At three P.M., the thunder of several hundred anti-aircraft guns was heard, and the three Agarthian ships were engulfed in the smoke and flame of bursting shells, or almost. It was observed that an area remained clear of explosions around their hulls for a depth of a hundred yards or so, as though neither shells nor shrapnel could penetrate a certain invisible protective screen that seemed to sur-

round the ships.

Then the cruisers turned their big guns upward and fired heavy calibre high velocity shells, but the shells were seen to disappear in blinding flashes of light before they could do any harm. They ceased firing after a half hour of useless effort.

In the meantime, about five hundred swift Army jet planes with rocket cannons filled the Sunday afternoon sky with flame, but also to no avail. The Agarthian ships were too close to Chicago for bombing maneuvers or for using atomic bombs, so no bombers appeared.

At precisely four P.M., the Agarthian flagship that had picked Kent up left the other two and sank to a level of two thousand feet. Then it moved majestically in over the city.

"*Citizens of America!*" boomed the greatly amplified voice of Stephen Germain from the flagship, so that about a million spectators on the rooftops and in the streets could hear him plainly. His voice and image were being broadcast by radio-television to all the forty-eight states simultaneously as he spoke. "*This is the voice of Agarthi! Agarthi comes to you and all the world today offering you truth, and the strength to abolish deception forever from the face of the Earth, so that Mankind may enter the promised Millenium of uninterrupted peace and progress!*"

During the next astounding hour, the people heard expounded the plan and social platform of the King of the World, just as it had been revealed to Rocky in the Administra-

tion Library of the Palace in Agarthi.

When the speech was finished, the President of the United States was invited to come on board and express his opinion to the nation. The President accepted. He went on board with Turner, Brion, Stierman and Dr. Grange and was joined there by a refreshed and redressed Michael Kent, who introduced Germain and his wife and the ship's captain to everyone. In the radio-television broadcasting chamber of the great space vessel, the President lost no time in giving the speech that shook the world.

"As the President of the United States of America," he said to his great audience, "I am a statesman and a politician, the one by definition and the other by necessity. As such it is naturally to be expected that I make a political speech." He paused for a full quarter of a minute, while over two hundred million people waited. "But I cannot do so under the circumstances," he continued in a voice suddenly filled with emotion. His long face acquired the hardness of flint as he glared into the televisor at the world. "*I must break all precedents—and tell you only—the Naked Truth!*"

And he did. He told about the cartel bosses and how public opinion was shaped by them, how they made of truth and honor and faith but cardboard shams to suit their own purposes, and how human progress was virtually impossible while they existed.

He was just beginning to explain how the plans of Agarthi provided

the best solution to all the major problems of human society, when something went wrong . . .

First of all, the television and radio transmitters on board burned out and melted down into an irreparable mass of junk. The President's voice and image were instantly blotted out. The last his audience saw of him, his eyes were filled with a sudden fear.

The Agarthian Ray operators detected the influence of a heat ray that could only have been generated by Elder weapons operated by the Nameless Ones. They immediately threw out the ray guard screens.

But their shield had gone out too late to block the teletransportation beams that kidnapped two of the most important persons on board—Stephen and Lillian Germain! They merely disappeared into thin air . . .

But this was not all . . .

Even after the guard screens went up, three unwelcome visitors came brazenly on board, or rather it should be said that they *appeared* on board. They appeared in the broadcasting chamber, just in front of the President. Tall men, immaculately dressed in tuxedos and wearing monocles, but with something peculiarly, namelessly *missing* about their faces!

Greg Stierman, Turner and Brion, closed in. But they felt like fishes out of water when their hands grasped thin air instead of flesh and bone!

"They're ghosts!" exclaimed Turner, turning pale.

Stierman and Brion stood there tensely, watching the three immacu-

late figures as they surrounded the President. In the presence and attitude of these three strangers, everyone in that room, including the helpless Agarthian technicians, sensed an all encompassing evil which was like a mind-dimming mist, something that struck at the roots of the subconscious and scared up mortal fear, like a bat-winged thing from the Unknown.

The only words one of them spoke were directed at the President: "Did you *really* think you could get away with it?"

The President suddenly found himself. He straightened up rather proudly and succeeded in dominating his instinctive fears.

"I recognize you now," he said calmly but very gravely. "You are the Nameless Ones who presume to control the world. I know you have come to kill me as you have killed all others before me who sought to speak the truth. Well, go ahead! You can erase *me*, but not what I have just said to several hundred million people. If this is the occasion for saying last words, then let mine be these: *I regret that I have only one life to give—for Mankind!*"

From the foreheads of the Nameless Ones, miniature streaks of lightning flashed out to converge upon the President's head. He sighed, as though choked with pain, and then he dropped dead to the floor.

Whereupon, the Nameless Ones disappeared . . .

In that room were, besides Stierman, Brion, Turner and Kent, the

first mate and two broadcast operators. The Agarthians did not speak English, except for their captain, and he had gone away earlier with Dr. Grange to examine the ship.

Stierman spoke to Kent. "I and Brion and Turner," he said, "are responsible for the President. We'd appreciate some help in tracing down the true assassins. Would you mind educating us as to what happened exactly, and *how* it happened?"

Kent looked pale and sick as he regarded the President's quiet form on the floor. Turner and Brion knelt down and picked him up. They put the dead executive in a comfortable chair, somehow unable to recognize the fact that the great man who had been speaking truth to the world but a minute before was now blotted out forever. Stierman only looked darkly, fiercely determined as he waited for Kent's answer. Sweat stood out on his forehead.

"I am making myself responsible," said Kent, "for Germain and his wife." Kent had grown up with Germain and Lillian. In fact, both men had been in love with Lillian—still were. "If you're willing to work with me," he continued, "we'll do something about this, but it's got to be fast. It's obvious that Germain and Lillian—that's his wife—will be taken to Headquarters, which is underneath Berlin.

"How will they get there, and how soon?" asked Brion.

"They must intend to work swiftly," replied Kent, "considering Agarthi's show of strength today, both here and in Europe. So they no

doubt have a high-powered strato-rocket somewhere with which they will transport their captives to Berlin. They might return to Berlin in such a conveyance in less than two hours."

"Can this ship do the same?" asked Stierman, grimly.

"Yes, even better," replied Kent. "But Berlin is the headquarters of the enemy. There are all the concentrated forces of the Nameless Ones, backed up by ancient weapons such as our own. We could not go there in one of these ships without opening a full scale attack, and we can't do that unless Agarthi orders it. My idea, however, was for us to—"

"Just a moment, Mr. Kent!"

They all turned around to see the captain of the ship standing in the companionway, behind whom stood a starry-eyed Dr. Grange whose face suddenly clouded as he looked at the President. The captain wore the black, shiny, short boots of the Agarthian space navy, silver colored action trunks and a handsome, jeweled belt which supported a disintegrator gun. A gold colored shirt that looked like chain mail covered his broad chest, bearing an emblazoned Sword of Agarthi, in pure, glistening white. From his muscular shoulders hung a pure white cloak down to the top of his heels. He was a handsome, strong-faced man with blue-gray eyes, which were shadowed by the short visor of a special type of helmet that contained compact electro-phonetic and telepathic devices.

"It will interest you to know,"

he said, "that *the King* has just communicated with us over the electro-phones."

"The King!" exclaimed Kent
"Does he know—"

The captain nodded his head. "It is war," he said. "It had been planned for next week sometime, but in view of what has happened the zero hour has been advanced to *now*. We have fifty space ships operating in various parts of the world. They have all been ordered to make a rendezvous over Paris at once. From there we move on Berlin. The forces of the Agarthian army, which are now over fifty thousand strong and reasonably well equipped, are being called upon to march from their position under Frankfurt directly on the headquarters of the Nameless Ones. We hope that by this time the Golden Guardsmen, led by Steven Rockner of Agarthi, have reached the rendezvous, because they are especially trained and equipped to be of great help to us. It is only regrettable that we haven't time to wait for our third ally, who was to arrive in a few days, as we need all the help we can get. The enemy is very strong."

"What ally is that?" asked Kent.

"The Moon People," replied the captain.

"Moon People! What in the devil —?"

"You must pardon me," said the captain. "I am needed on the bridge." He paused, as his first mate joined him, to say, "The other gentlemen present may join us if they wish, or disembark, but they must decide at once." He waited, looking at them.

Stierman raised his slightly oriental eyes from the figure of the dead President to Lieutenant Colonel Brion and Sam Turner. He saw the answer in their set faces and in the steely glint in their eyes.

"Thank you," said Stierman. "We'll stay."

Kent would have grinned happily under other circumstances, but Germain's and Lillian's disappearance, the President's death, the sickening awareness of an overwhelming power of evil that had visited them, and now this declaration of a war to end

all wars, was enough to make him frown deeply with anxiety. But he was glad, nevertheless, that Stierman, Turner, Brion and Grange were along. He felt attached to them, as though they all formed a good fighting group together.

This is it, he told himself, to the final end . . .

END OF COLOSSUS II

(Coming next issue, COLOSSUS III, the final story in S. J. Byrne's trilogy of a new world.)

REVIEWS OF CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS

By FORREST J. ACKERMAN

THE THIRTY-FIRST OF FEBRUARY

by Nelson Bond; Gnome Press, NY, '49; 272 pages; \$3.

WE HAVE learned, via the Newspeak of Geo. Orwell's unspeakable world of "1984," that 2+2 may equal 5, so it should not be difficult to accept Mr. Bond's dictum that there are 31 days in February. Actually it is the dictum of no less an auctorial deity than James Branch Cabell, who once intended the title for a chapter in "The Witch Woman," a discarded manuscript, and graciously presented it to his admirer to title his present collection.

"The 31st" is subtitled *13 Flights of Fantasy*, and Nelson Bond is a high-flier indeed. In "The Sportsman" he writes something like Lord Dunsany spinning a Jorkens yarn; in "The Mask of Medusa" he is reminiscent of Bloch; "The Enchanted Pencil" might have been written by Henry Kuttner. This is not to suggest in the least that Mr. Bond is a deliberate copyist. He

even gives Bill Shakespeare a pun for his money when it comes to laying on words in a playful manner.

One of the most interesting in Bond's baker's dozen is "The Cunning of the Beast," a sort of cybernetics-in-reverse story of flesh-and-blood beings being created by a robot to serve mechanical men! If I am not mistaken, "Pilgrimage," which closes the volume, was originally titled "The Priestess Who Rebelled," and is in fact the first of the famous "Priestess" series. How about that, editor Rap—you introduced them, didn't you?

Bond is a conscientious craftsman who polishes up his pulp work before permitting it to be bound between hard covers, and the result is quite commendable. The book is good both physically and "spiritually," topped off by a tasteful jacket.

THE JUSTICE OF MARTIN BRAND

By G. H. Irwin

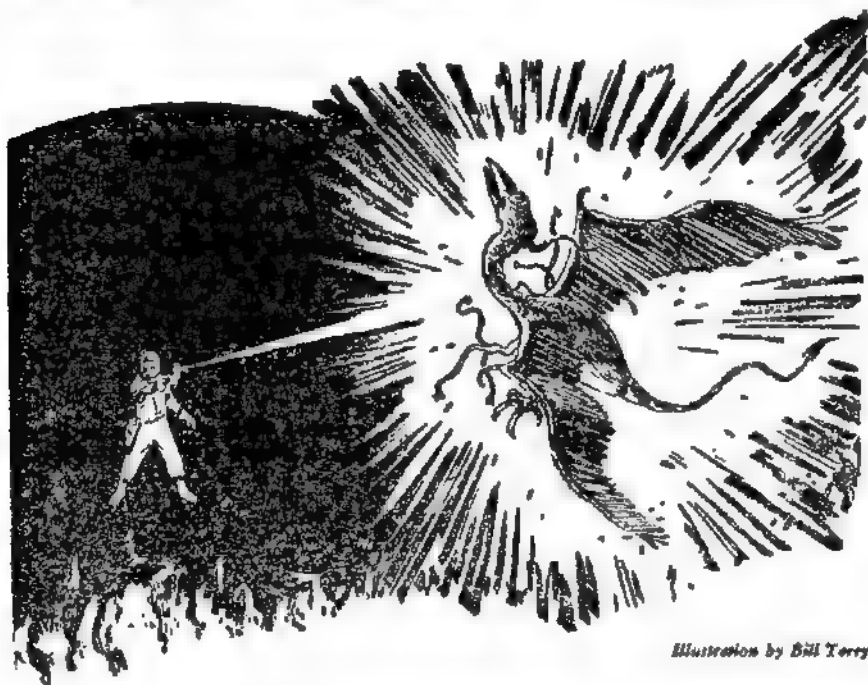


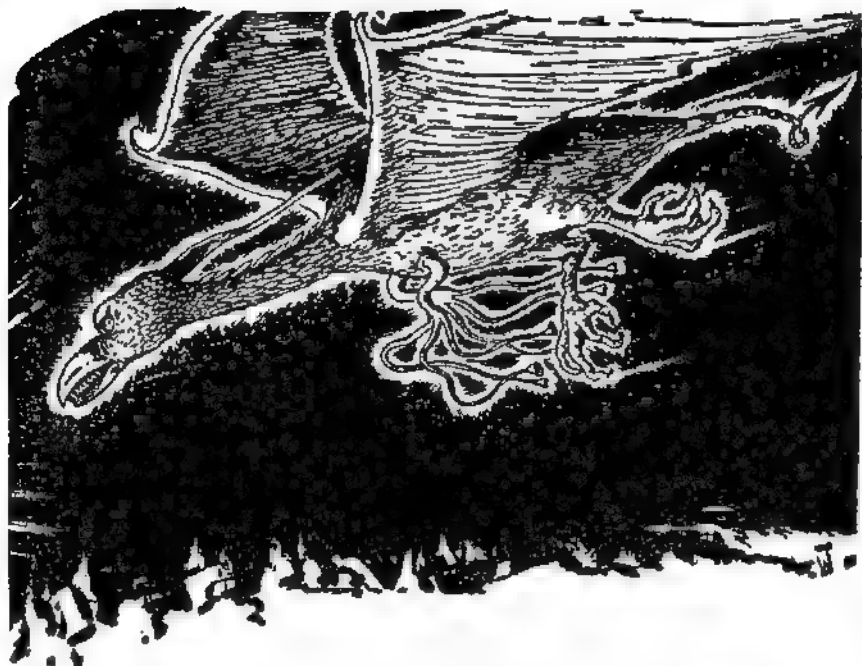
Illustration by Bill Terry

Martin Brand was executed as a traitor and his coffin was enshrined in memory of a hero. Then a woman in love did a strange thing—she opened the coffin . . . and war flared across three worlds.

"IT'S A crazy thing, Kathleen," Hal Orson said in a savage whisper. "Worse still, it can only hurt you. He's dead . . . why open up old wounds? You'll break your heart . . ."

"It's already broken," Kathleen Dennis said in a tight, strained voice. "It broke the day they took him away, condemned as a traitor, and I believed it . . . until you told me the truth."

Orson stopped in the darkness and grasped her arm. "Kathy, please don't do it! You don't know how much trouble you can get into if you are caught at this mad scheme. You couldn't possibly explain why you did it—" Orson pulled her around until



Driven by the most powerful emotions of which a human being is capable, Martin Brand sought out the Martian fifth column in Luna—but when he destroyed it, he became a living dead man.

she faced him in the gloom of the tomb's interior. "Just why *are* you doing it?" he insisted. "Why! For the life of me I can't understand..."

"Why did *you* agree to come along in the first place?" she whispered fiercely.

He tried to see her face in the gloom, but it was only a pale oval, and for an instant he thought he saw something glistening, as though there were tears on her cheeks reflecting little glints of light from some unseen

source. He lifted one hand and brushed his fingers across her velvet skin. They came away wet. He shook his head in irritation.

"Because I was his best friend—or as good a friend as he'd let anybody be. And because..." He fumbled for words, but the wetness on his fingers strangled them in his throat. To say more would only hurt her worse...

"Because you felt there was a possibility that I might be right," she

finished for him. "That he might not be . . ."

"Kathy," he begged. "Don't say it. You'll break yourself up . . ."

"Because I'm crying?" she asked, defiantly. "Hal, discovering that he really is dead can't hurt me half as much as the torture of not knowing. And as long as this doubt gnaws at me, I'll be a river of pain dammed forever from the sea. The dam *will* break if I don't relieve the pressure."

"Then let *me* look!" he exclaimed. "There's no use in burning such a ghastly picture into your mind . . ."

"Don't be afraid of that," she said. "For eleven years I've burned a picture of him into my mind—ten years while I worshipped him from a distance, and one since I told him I loved him. No other picture can replace that one. I can take it, Hal, I'm no baby."

"You're crying like one," he said, and regretted the words instantly. "I'm sorry, Kathy. I didn't mean that. I'm a fool . . ." His voice broke and he stopped speaking.

She reached out and touched her cool fingers to his face. He stood still while they explored. He didn't flinch when she found the wetness.

"Hal," she said. "You're good. Too good to get into trouble because of me. Go now, Hal—I'll finish the job alone."

He hefted the crowbar in his left hand. "No!" he said roughly. "I'm going to take this tomb apart, stone for stone, and if he's in there, I'm going to take the Capitol Building apart right afterward!" He strode on through the gloom of the marble

monument to seek the hero whose real heroism had never even been told, whose life had been forfeited by the cowardice of a nation's government. Kathleen followed behind him, clutching his right hand with her left.

They reached the rail around the sunken marble mausoleum and Orson halted. "Over you go," he whispered. "I'll let you down and you can drop the last foot or so. It's only eight feet . . ." He put down the crowbar, and it clanged loudly against the floor.

Kathleen clambered over the rail. He grasped both her wrists and lowered her gently, leaning over as far as he could. Then, with a whispered warning, he released his grip. He heard her soft sandals slap against the floor, and knew that she hadn't lost her balance.

"Here I come," he said, picking up the crowbar.

In an instant he stood beside her in the gloom and fumbled in his pocket for the black-light spectacles necessary to give them vision. She put on a pair, and as he donned his, she snapped on the black-light flash. Without the glasses, nothing would have been visible at all in the impenetrable darkness. An eerie reddish-glow seemed to fill the chamber. He turned to look at her. She stood stiffly, staring at the huge marble coffin in the center of the circular floor. Even in the weird light he could see that her face was starkly white.

He clenched his fist so tightly that the nails bit into his palm, and turned almost savagely toward the coffin.

She held the light while he placed the crowbar against the thin crack that marked the lid. The slab was tremendously heavy, but by fractional inches he forced the thin edge of the bar beneath it until enough of it was under the slab to give leverage. His first heave moved the slab not more than an inch. He tried it again, and once more he moved the slab a tiny bit.

"Can you do it?" Kathleen asked anxiously.

"It's a cinch you alone couldn't have," he grunted.

"I'd have smashed it," she said simply, "if it took me all night. I don't think anyone outside could hear what went on in here. It's almost soundproof."

"I hope so," he said, inching the bar under the slab once more. "It looks as though we'll be making plenty of noise before I get this off."

Ten sweating minutes later the slab had moved enough to show a thin black line of the interior of the outer coffin. Orson thrust the crowbar into it with a mighty heave. The muscles in his shoulders bunched as he strained against the bar. Then the lid slid aside as though it were greased and fell with a thunderous crash to the floor. The echoes were deafening in the vaulted chamber, then silence came once more.

They waited almost a full minute, listening for the sound of running footsteps, for an alarm; but no further sound came other than their hoarse breathing.

Kathleen thrust the light over the

edge of the sarcophagus.

"The coffin!" she gasped. "It's there!"

"Of course," he said, almost savagely. "It would be. And it's going to be a devil of a job to open it. It's metal, and it'll be bolted shut. I only hope the wrenches I've brought will fit . . ."

He tried them one by one, then grunted as he found one that worked. He began loosening the first bolt . . .

An hour later he sank back, his hands bleeding. "There, that's the last one," he gasped, "but I'll have to rest a moment. I haven't got the strength left to lift that cover . . ."

Kathleen laid the flash on the floor and leaned over the coffin.

"Kathy!" said Orson sharply. "Don't . . ."

But with one superhuman heave, she lifted the metal cover. It crashed aside, ringing as though a thousand gongs had been clashed together. Orson clapped his hands over his ears, then took them off. He looked at Kathleen, who was peering into the coffin.

Suddenly she screamed. Again and again she screamed, ear-piercing shrieks that penetrated his eardrums with more intensity than had the noise of the metal coffin lid.

He leaped forward, grasped her in his arms and pulled her away from the coffin.

"Kathy! Come away! Don't look any more . . ."

Her screams stopped and she whirled on him, sobbing shrilly. "Hal! He's . . . *he's not there*. He's

not there! Don't you understand? ... *He's alive!* He's not dead at all; he's alive! The coffin's empty!"

"Oh God," said Hal Orson, folding her trembling body in his arms. "Oh God!"

As he stood there, holding the sobbing girl tightly, his mind went back to that memorable day when the "luck of Suicide Martin Brand" had become almost a legend with the Interplanetary Patrol. They had heard it all over his transmitter, which, in the heat of battle, he had forgotten to turn off. They had heard him screaming his defiance at his enemies while he plunged in for his suicidal attack against impossible odds, accompanied by the roar of Wagner's immortal *Die Walküre* dinning at them out of their loudspeakers from the music tape he habitually carried into battle with him . . .

* * *

"COME and get me, boys! — If you can!"

Martin Brand clenched one space-browed fist around the fighter's throttle and threw the ship into a screaming, roaring bank that ended in a terrific dive straight down, parallel with the breath-taking forty-thousand feet of cliff that was one side of the Liebnitz Mountains. With his other hand he pressed a switch on the control panel—a switch that had all the earmarks of having been crudely installed by one who was not a mechanic.

There was a faint hum, then from a speaker mounted over his head came a burst of music.

Brand grinned as the strains of Wagner's inspired music dinned in his ears. He turned up the volume still further, until the roar of the music drowned out the drone of his rockets.

"Now come on, you lousy ambushers!" he roared.

Behind the ship against the rocky wall of the Liebnitz, a brilliant, soundless puff of light momentarily erased the inky moon-shadows at the mountain's foot.

"Missed!" exclaimed Brand triumphantly. "And you had me boxed!"

Suddenly, across his sights flashed a hurtling dot. Brand tripped his guns. Once again the bright light puffed, this time as one of Brand's shells exploded—in the hull of the enemy ship.

"That's it!" screamed Brand. "The luck of 'Suicide' Martin Brand! Back on Earth I'm a legend, but right here, I'm a damn fool—a fool even the devil won't kill."

There was something bitter in Brand's tone as he shouted aloud over the crash of the magnificent Siegfried music which was filling the control room of the tiny fighter rocket. There was bitter recklessness in the thrust of his hand as he bore the throttle over hard and sent the flier zooming up again in a heart-bursting maneuver.

The fire of the remaining three pirates—the thought of the word pirate brought an angry flash to Brand's eyes—converged on the Lunar floor over which he'd been, and then, suddenly, they were below him and in

line with his sights as he looped over at the top of his upward rush.

Once again those brown fingers clenched, and this time a spray of shells vomited outward toward his enemies. Not just one lucky pot-shot, but a barrage with all six forward-guns.

Brilliance blinded him as thirty-six - magnesium-atomics burst all around the diving ships trapped in his sights. When the light faded, he saw another ship dropping in a mass of fragments toward the desolate surface below. The other two were streaking desperately across the sea bottom, crater-hopping like mad, to put distance between them and the demon fighter who had so recklessly and amazingly escaped the perfect "box" ambush they had laid for him along the slopes of the Lieb-nitz.

Without pausing, Brand lanced his ship after them. Gray lava swept under the belly of his flier with a blur of motion. With a grim, set grin on his lips, he centered the cross-hairs on the flames of the laggard's rockets. His fingers pressed delicately. Six shells "ringed" the ship, blasting it into fragments that showered down even as Brand's flier tore through the expanding gas of the explosion.

It was then that the surviving ship made its fatal mistake. At the range that now existed, the pirate might have escaped had its pilot continued in a straight line. Instead he shot his ship outward into space in an attempt to flee the satellite.

Brand's pursuing ship flared across

the heavens. He instantly computed the angle of intersection, then waited, squinting his eyes. The pirate ship sped up into range of his guns . . .

Ten seconds later the fight was over. The wreck of the last pirate ship twisted madly as it hurtled down to a soundless crash on the airless sea-bottom.

Brand slacked speed, bore his ship around, and then brought it to a long, gliding landing near the wreckage.

And as he did so, a rocket flared beyond the wrecked ship. A tiny one-man escape rocket looped over a crater rim and streaked toward the horizon. Brand cursed.

"Damn! He got out before she crashed!"

There was no chance of taking-off in time to catch the speedy little ship, so he switched on his communicator and roared into it.

"Run! You rat! And when you get home, tell your boss I'll get him sooner or later. The next time he tries to trap me, tell him to bring out his whole damn fleet!"

There was a faint hum in the receiver, and Brand snapped off his recorder, which was still blasting out the music of his favorite selection.

A voice came faintly from the speaker. Brand turned up the volume to its peak. With a crackling of static, but still quite clearly, the voice spoke.

"You never could hang on to anything, Martin Brand," came the voice, dripping with mockery. "Not even a girl! And the next time we meet, you won't be so lucky. I'll

bring you in and you can give the boss your own messages!"

There was a sudden snap and the hum faded from the speaker. The man in the escape rocket had cut off his radio.

But Martin Brand sat as though frozen, only the static of empty space breaking the silence inside his fighter. Only static; until his voice cracked out in a hoarse whisper that, had it become flesh and blood, would have been incarnate hate.

"Jeffry Killian!"

Again and again through Martin Brand's head echoed the words he had just heard. *You could never hang on to anything, Martin Brand. Not even a girl!* And as they repeated themselves over and over, another voice whispered in his mind . . . a voice as soft and musical as a summer breeze in a forest; cool, alluring, sweet. It whispered in his mind and carried him back over ten long years . . .

* * *

"I love you, Martin. Oh so very much . . ."

Martin Brand crushed the slim girl's form to him as he kissed her yielding lips, passionately, tenderly, adoringly.

"We're going to be so happy, Estelle," he said. "Just wait till you see the home I've built for you. It's the coziest thing on three planets . . ."

"I can hardly wait," she said. "And I'll treasure everything in it. You've worked and fought so long and so hard to get it . . ."

"Just for you," he put in.

"Just for me?" she questioned coyly. "You've only known me five months. Couldn't it just as well have been any other girl?"

He clutched her to him.

"Not I've known you ever since I was old enough to know there could be anything like you on Earth. I've pictured you in my mind since almost the first time I rocketed a ship into space, a raw kid in the Interplanetary Patrol. I don't think there could have been a little home if you hadn't really existed."

"You dear," she said softly. "You idealistic darling."

He fished in his pocket, showed her the deed to their home to be, and for many moments they read it together.

"I've got to go now," he said then. "But I'll see you tomorrow morning at the spaceport. Then we'll walk up to Commander Wilson and get tied up in glorious style. Great old man, Commander Wilson. Not a man in the universe I'd rather rocket with. He gave me official orders to let him do the officiating."

"It'll be wonderful," she breathed.

Again he kissed her, and left.

"Commander wants to see you," said Brand's roommate when he reached his quarters. "Probably wants to make sure you've got the ring."

Brand grinned. He put his fingers into his watch pocket, removed a tiny box and flipped it at the rocketeer.

"From now on, Hal, it's your worry. You're best man, you know. And

if I haven't a ring when Commander Wilson calls for it, there'll be one member of the Orson family who'll rocket no more!"

"Take more than a Brand to stop an Orson," the rocketeer tossed at Brand's back which was retreating through the doorway.

Brand knocked at Commander Wilson's door and waited. A gruff voice answered and he went in. He closed the door behind him, saluted sharply.

"Lieutenant Brand reporting as ordered, sir," he said.

Commander Wilson's space-tanned face appeared rather red in the glow of the desk light before him.

"Never mind the formality, son," he said. "Sit down. I've got some things to say to you."

He fussed around at some papers on his desk for a moment, while Brand seated himself and waited.

"Damned nuisance!" fumed the commander. "Just when I wanted a vacation . . ."

Brand leaned forward, startled.

"We haven't been ordered out?" he questioned anxiously.

"Not immediately. But we leave in four days. You'll have a very short honeymoon, lad. Three days."

Brand looked disappointed, then he stiffened.

"We can arrange it, sir. If this thing's what I think it is, it's more important. We can continue the honeymoon later. After all, we'll have a long time to be married."

Wilson chuckled.

"That's youth for you--think the honeymoon will never end. Well, I

hope it doesn't, lad, because . . ." the commander sobered ". . . maybe the next ten years are going to be tough ones."

"The Martians?"

"Yes. The latest report comes from Luna. It seems a party of Martian scientists have obtained permission from the Lunarian government to conduct archeological explorations on the dark side. Archeology my foot! The dirty snakes are scouting the territory for military purposes."

"You mean you think Senator Beasley is right? That Mars intends to invade Earth?"

Commander Wilson grunted.

"I'm a soldier," he said. "I can see a million reasons why Mars should want to invade us, and *how* they could do it. Those damned pacifists keep prating about 41 million miles of space being a bulwark of natural defense. Bulwark, my hat! It's just a matter of coasting. What they really need is a base of operations near us . . . and that base is the moon."

"What are our orders?" asked Brand.

"Unofficial," said Wilson. "Senator Beasley and the President aren't asleep. We're to 'scout' beyond interplanetary limits and keep our eyes open, but damn it, that isn't enough! Sooner or later we're going to have to institute a secret-service unit which will work entirely on its own risk—a body that can fight it out freelance and be prepared to take the rap if caught . . ."

"Count me in on that, Commander," said Brand swiftly. "I . . ."

"Not a chance." Wilson shook his head. "That'll be for single men only. It's too much of a suicide job. For instance, if the Lunarians nabbed one of these operatives, he'd probably be liable to life imprisonment, or even shot as a spy, and our government would have to deny him altogether. In fact, he'd forfeit his citizenship when he went into the service."

"You talk as though this service were already in existence."

"Not yet. But let's talk about that wedding tomorrow. Has she picked out a ring . . .?"

A confused babble of voices drifted across the take-off platform of the Space Patrol landing field. Brilliantly uniformed rocketeers stood chatting with lovely girls, and behind them loomed the tremendous mass of the blasting pit's metal - and - concrete walls. The morning sun was shining brightly, and beneath an arbor of flowers stood Commander Wilson, waiting. Before him stood a double line of officers of the Space Patrol, wearing their dress swords. At the far end of the line stood Martin Brand and Hal Orson.

Brand was fidgeting nervously, peering often toward the gates of the landing field, which yawned to the highway outside. It was here the limousine that would bring Estelle Carter and her bridesmaids was scheduled to appear.

"This thing's twisted," said Orson. "Isn't it supposed to be the groom who traditionally keeps the bride waiting?"

Brand grinned faintly.

"She's worth waiting for, Hal. But if she doesn't come soon, I'll need a fresh collar . . ."

Ten minutes passed, and Commander Wilson moved back into the shade of the arbor. Orson's face took on a sober look, and every few minutes he fumbled in his jacket pocket wherein reposed the ring for which he was responsible.

The purr of an atomic motor came from the road beyond the fence, and Brand stood erect. The line of officers snapped to attention; white gloves went to sword hilts in readiness.

A messenger's cycle swept in through the gate in a swirl of dust. Its rider dismounted, propped up his machine and strode forward.

"Lieutenant Martin Brand?" he asked.

Brand stepped forward.

"Here."

Brand took the message the boy handed him, while Orson tossed the lad a coin.

"Something wrong, Martin?" asked Orson while Brand scanned the message he had removed from the envelope.

Brand's face went white as the words bit into his brain . . .

Congratulate us. Estelle and I will be married by the time you read this. No hard feelings. The best man won. Jeffry Killian.

He didn't hear Orson's repeated question. He stood there, a blood-red haze before his eyes, a roar in his head. Slowly his fingers curled into a white-knuckled fist, crushing the paper into a ball. Then they relaxed and the paper fell to the ground.

Unseeing, unhearing, oblivious of the tense silence that hung over the landing field, he strode through the gate toward his car.

He didn't hear the curse that Hal Orson let loose as he picked up and read the message. Hal Orson was too enraged to notice the pink cheeks which he caused to appear on some of the girl attendants, and tensed jaws on the part of their escorts. The curse was echoed by Commander Wilson in modified form as he read the sheet from Orson's hand.

"The skunk! The no-good, rotten rat!"

As he strode through the gate, whispered words formed on Brand's lips.

"*She ditched me!*" he said. "Ditched me for a dare-devil space-racer. Eloped! And she only went out with him once . . ."

His hand whipped inside his jacket, tore out the deed to the little house. He ripped it into fragments and threw it to the winds. And then he laughed, harshly and loudly.

There was a heavy silence in the room. Hal Orson fumbled aimlessly with the television set, as a variety of scenes faded in and out on the screen.

"We take-off at noon tomorrow," he said abstractly. "Be good to get into space again. I've got a belly-full of this inaction . . ."

Brand sat on the bed, looking dazed. He remained silent. Orson looked at him, shook his head, frowned, then returned his attention to the televisior. More scenes flashed

on. A newscaster's face appeared. His voice droned . . .

Martian war spread to another front on the red world today, when the Syrtis armies attacked tiny Malvia without warning. Tank columns followed initial attack by rocket-bombers and smashed through Malvian defenses at three vital points . . .

The announcer's voice went on and his features were replaced at times by maps illustrating the areas under discussion. Then he launched into an account of local news.

Early this morning the wrecked racing-rocket of the famed interplanetary-racer, Jeffry Killian, was found on the Maine coast, half submerged. A young woman, tentatively identified as Miss Estelle Carter of New York, was taken from the crack-up in serious condition . . .

Orson turned slowly to face Martin Brand, who was rising to his feet, a stricken expression on his face as he faced the televisior screen. On the screen now was a view of the wreck, a grimly shattered object washed by foamy seas as the wind roared in a gale from the Atlantic. The announcer's voice continued:

. . . and has been removed to the Community Hospital at Boston. The body of Jeffry Killian has not been located as yet, and it is believed that it may be lost in the sea, thrown clear of the wreckage.

Hal Orson snapped off the television and tossed Brand his coat.

"Come on Martin, we'd better get started. I'll rocket you up there in my speedster."

Brand's face was pale, and his

browned hand was trembling as he caught the coat.

"Thanks, Hal," he said. "But don't spare the fireworks. I've got to get to her before . . . before . . ."

"We will," promised Orson. "We'll be there in a half-hour."

"She isn't badly injured physically," said the doctor, "bruises and contusions, a broken arm, and head injuries. We had to operate on her head as soon as we got her here—pressure on the brain. Would have killed her in another two hours. Unfortunately, a bone chip on the inside of the skull had penetrated a portion of the brain, causing damage to an extent which we can't predict at the moment. It may be . . ."

"How's she now?" asked Brand tensely. "Can I see her?"

The doctor shrugged.

"Yes, you can see her, but it isn't exactly—well, pretty. You see, she's violently insane."

Brand went white.

"You mean . . .?"

"Perhaps. There's not much hope that she'll regain her sanity. There's been some sort of mental shock also. Perhaps the sight of her . . . companion drowning while she was powerless to help him."

"I want to see her," said Brand, tight-lipped.

The doctor led the way down the corridor to a small room. Brand entered first. He halted as he saw the figure on the bed.

"She's strapped down!" he exclaimed.

On the bed lay Estelle Carter, her

legs and arms strapped to the bed, a leather strap across her breast. Her head was heavily bandaged and one arm was in a cast. Her eyes were open, and they stared directly into Brand's with an intense glare that stopped his lips with shock.

"Look at the tin soldier boy!" she jeered. "I hate you! I hate you! I hate everybody! You've got stars in your eyes . . ."

In startling change she recoiled, fearful, eyes dilated.

"Stars!" she shrieked. "They're in your eyes, and they're getting bigger. The whole sky is full of them. Running races, that's what they are. Racers! And cowards too! They aren't really racing—they're running away . . . ooohhhh-hh!"

Her voice ended in a high-treble scream, filled with utter terror combined with horrible hate. She tossed convulsively on the bed.

"The fool! He thought I loved him. He got a deed to a nasty little shack . . . Get away from me. You've got racers in your eyes!"

Martin Brand recoiled. Then he moaned and a shudder shook his big shoulders. Abruptly he wheeled, ran from the room, colliding with Hal Orson whose face was white and tense.

Outside, sobs tore from Brand's throat, while Orson gripped his arm tightly and held it.

Commander Wilson extended his hand and shook that of Martin Brand, soberly but with feeling.

"Welcome to the Special Service," he said. "From now on you are a

free agent. You will receive your instructions from me only, and your area will be 24B-Luna. Your identity has been established as Robert Wales, political criminal. No one connects Robert Wales with Martin Brand, the ace of the Interplanetary Patrol. As Robert Wales you have no rights as a citizen, although none can deny that you are still an Earthman. All of your actions will be those of a renegade. But your job is to smash the plot that is brewing on Luna. Mars must not be allowed to establish a fifth-column there, nor to invade. Until the 'powers that be' realize our danger, we must work in the dark. If you get into trouble, your government will deny you."

Brand nodded.

"I know. It's all right. I have nothing to lose." His voice was dull.

Commander Wilson poured a brandy from his private stock.

"Drink this," he said. "And snap out of it, son. You've got a job to do. And you've done a noble thing by setting aside all of your savings as a fund for Estelle. She'll be taken care of. But don't let it make you bitter, lad. There are other women . . ."

"Not in this service!" snapped Brand. "Remember what you told me once before?"

"Sure, but . . ."

"That's the way it suits me," said Brand. "And as far as my job is concerned, the Martians will wish I'd never been born."

"I'm sure they will," said Wilson, a troubled look in his eyes, "but don't be reckless. A dead agent is of no use

to us, you know."

A flinty grin crossed Brand's face.

"I don't die easily, Commander," he said. "But neither will I live long enough to be a sucker again!"

* * *

Martin Brand stared unseeingly across the wastes of the lunar plain which stretched back toward the towering heights of the Liebnitz from which he had just come. Still ringing through his brain were those words he had spoken ten long years before. They had been the basis for the Martin Brand the solar system now knew as "Suicide" Martin Brand, the luckiest man alive—and the most daring.

Ten years ago, his life had been blasted into a terrible bitterness. Now, when he thought the wound healed by time, a voice had come out of the ether from a crater-hopping little escape ship, tearing it wide open once more. A voice that he hated, a voice he had thought he'd never hear again.

"He isn't dead!" Brand's voice rang with hate and shock in the tiny confines of his little pursuit ship. "*Jeffry Killian is still alive!* He didn't drown when his ship cracked up . . ."

The full significance of it jolted home in his mind.

"The rat cracked her up, thought she was dead, and ran out on her like a coward. And she *knew!* She was insane, but she still remembered he'd run out on her! And later—he must have known it!—hearing that she was insane, he never came back.

Let her shift for herself . . ."

Martin Brand's face writhed in an old hate, now reborn to full growth in a terrible manner.

"I'll get you, Killian!" he swore. "I'll get you, if I have to tear the whole Moon apart!"

Beneath the savage pressure of his fingers, the pursuit rocket roared up from the age-old dust of the lunar plain, shot over the wrecks of the ships he had shot down, and out into space toward Earth.

Three days later, Martin Brand, dressed in the rough garb of a prospector, peered from the porthole of the limping freighter which was settling down past the high rim of the crater that exactly centered the side of the Moon eternally hidden from Earth. He watched with interest as darkness settled around the ship. The gloom became deeper as the ship sank into the bowels of this pock-marked world.

As he watched, the admonishing words of Commander Wilson rang in his memory. *It's a tough hunch you're playing, my boy. If it really was Jeffry Killian you saw, then something is going on inside Luna that's no good at all. No good at all! Whatever you encounter will be strictly your own funeral if it blows up in your face. Good luck, son. Somehow, soon, we've got to smash that Martian infiltration, or it's curtains for Earth.*

Yes, it would be strictly his funeral—because now he wasn't Martin Brand. He was Robert Wales, and Robert Wales was an outlaw on

Earth. He'd lost his citizenship because of seditious acts. Oh, yes, the rest of the solar system would accept him without much question. His wasn't a universal criminal act. In fact, much of the solar system would secretly approve of an Earthman who was a seditionist . . . Mars especially, and perhaps Venus. On Luna he would use still another name (he'd selected Edgar Barnes) because Luna was anxious about Mars, and curried favor from Earth. And too, she was a bit irritated because Earth politicians stuck bull-headedly to their isolationist policy. Luna also resented being a "buffer" between Earth and Mars without getting credit for it.

If Luna discovered that Edgar Barnes was Robert Wales she might deport him, certainly not to Earth, but very likely to Venus. So Martin Brand intended to play his dual role with all the cunning—and uncanny luck—that was his.

The freighter was dropping now into an illuminated area. Light came from below, and suddenly with the shock that it always brings to persons making a first descent into the hollow world, the breath-taking spectacle of the cavern's immensity opened out beneath him. There was a city there. A modern Lunar city, built, precariously it seemed, on a terrific slope. How it could have remained there was an incredible mystery.

Brand shifted his body, and the mystery was a mystery no longer; for he almost fell, with a new shift of balance from a new center of gravity. The precipitous slope on

which the city stood became a flat plain, and the black hole of the crater through which the ship now emerged shifted from its former vertical appearance to a low-slanting shaft that bore off at an angle.

A moment later he adjusted himself to the sudden change in direction, found the new "down" and regained his equilibrium. And when he had accomplished it, the ship shuddered with the contact of its faulty landing in the rocket cradles at the city spaceport.

As he walked down the gangplank, reeling slightly with the unaccustomed light gravity in spite of his leaded shoes, Brand wanted to laugh aloud. He stopped himself as he heard several others laughing boisterously, then he saw them peering around with a foolish look on their faces. There had been nothing to laugh at. Brand grinned faintly at their discomfiture, realizing the cause of the unseemly mirth . . . oxygen. The atmosphere of this inner-lunar world was artificial and richer in pure oxygen than that of Earth. Its too-swift stimulation often caused this reaction when first breathed into lungs unaccustomed to it.

Brand stopped grinning as he saw a girl standing just outside the gate of the spaceport looking at him with what he was certain was startled recognition. But she was a perfect stranger to him, and he frowned. Her face now, as she saw him looking at her, went cold and emotionless and casual.

Brand walked over toward her, seemed about to pass without further

notice, then whirled upon her.

"Do I know you?" he asked abruptly.

It seemed to him that she drew in her breath just a bit too sharply. "No," she said in a low voice, staring straight at him. "You don't."

"Wrong reaction," he said flatly. "You're supposed to say: 'Can't you think up a more original approach than that—go fry your hide.' I know I don't know you. But I'd swear you know me."

She continued to look at him levelly.

"What is your name?" she asked. "If you're well-known enough, I might have heard of you."

"Edgar Barnes," he answered. "Prospector."

"No," she said. "I don't know you."

She turned and walked away.

Brand watched her retreating back a moment, noting the lilting sway of her body, the grace of each step, the proud carriage of her head. He saw too the rich red-gold of her hair, and remembered that her eyes had been a startling deep blue. He had noticed also that her lips had been anything but forbidding, even tightly drawn as they had been in what he could not certainly identify as deception.

Had she recognized him, or hadn't she? Was she concealing an initial betrayal of such recognition, or had she, like himself, been surprised at the laughter caused by the oxygen in the air? But he hadn't laughed; why look at him?

He shrugged, turned and strode

through the city streets.

Ahead of him he saw a brilliantly lighted cafe. Its neon lights proclaimed it as the "Star Club." Parked in front of it were sleek aero-cabs and several fast, low-slung compression flyers.

Brand nodded to himself.

"There's where I'll find some of the big boys. Perfect front for intrigue."

He turned in at the entrance and was halted by a doorman.

"You can't go in dressed like that."

Brand grinned.

"Call the manager," he said, "unless you'd rather take this ten-spot yourself. I've got a little to unload . . ."

The doorman snatched the bill Brand handed him, grinned back, and said, "Sure. The boss'll understand when I give him the sign. And thanks . . ."

Brand followed a waiter to a small table to one side, seated himself and ordered a drink. Then he sat quietly, listening to the haunting strains of the Lunarian stringed orchestra which was wailing its odd cadences for the dancing of the couples swaying voluptuously on the dance floor.

Lunarian dances were the ultimate in sensuous expression. Brand snorted, and downed his drink in a gulp when it came. The waiter lifted his eyebrows, and Brand ordered another, loudly.

Several men nearby looked at him, studied him a moment.

One of them got up and sauntered over. He was dressed in evening at-

tire, and immaculately groomed, but there was a queer tightness of his suit around the chest, and Brand's eyes narrowed slightly as the fellow sat down opposite him. There was a shoulder holster under his arm, and a steamgun in it. There was no mistaking that tell-tale tightness, for Brand.

"Prospector?" queried his guest.

"Of sorts." Brand shrugged. "Just landed. Thought I'd try my hand at the caves."

"Bad business, those caves," said the stranger affably. "Takes a good man to browse around in 'em. Never prospected myself, but I've hunted lu-bats in those caves. Incidentally, my name's Ormandy. Saw you down that drink, which is exactly how I feel at the moment. Mind if I join you in the next?"

"Why should I? Maybe you can give me some dope on the caves—that's worth sharing a drink."

The waiter arrived, and strangely enough he had the other man's drink on his tray.

"They know me here," explained Ormandy. "When I sit down at a table, any table, they stick my drink in front of me."

"Not a bad thing," grinned Brand, "saves time."

He lifted his glass, then held it rigidly in his fingers for a moment. There, behind Ormandy, across the room, was the girl Brand had accosted at the spaceport. There was no mistaking the red sheen of that lovely hair. And once more she was staring at him. This time there was no recognition, just a studied atten-

tion that held him motionless with surprise for an instant.

"What's up?" queried Ormandy. "See a lu-bat?"

He turned to stare in the direction Brand was looking, and raised his eyebrows.

"Say," he said in approval. "Don't blame you for looking. She's strictly inner-world!"

Brand recovered himself hastily.

"Yeah," he agreed, tossing his drink over his shoulder into a potted-palm as the girl looked away. Ormandy's head was still turned. Brand smacked his lips and put his glass down.

Ormandy drank his, then leaned on the table.

"You haven't introduced yourself," he said. "Not curious, but I ought to have a handle to hang on you. Any one'll do."

Brand grinned.

"Ed Barnes," he said. "Just an ordinary name, but it's done me this long, I guess you can use it too."

"Y'know," said Ormandy. "For a minute I thought you were somebody else, but I guess it's that deep coat of space-tan you've got. Either you've been prospecting the airless asteroids, or been rocketing around space for a spell."

"Both," said Brand. "In fact, this is the first air outside of a tank I've breathed in a long time, except on the freighter that brought me here. I shipped on from a space station out of New York, intended to go to Earth, but decided against it. I've always wanted to try the Luna

caves."

Ormandy reached carelessly into his vest. When his hand came out, he palmed a small steam pistol. The tiny opening in the barrel was all that was visible to Brand as he stared at the hand. He didn't move a muscle.

Across the room a nattily-dressed American space-lieutenant lifted his voice in a popular space song which the orchestra was playing at the moment. His voice rang out clearly, but slightly tipsily in the quiet that seemed to have fallen over the room.

*"Let me tell you of a girl
I met among the stars.
Her eyes are blue as Rigel,
Her lips as red as Mars."*

"Ten years ago," said Ormandy softly, "I stood in line at a wedding ceremony, my sword at the ready. I was prepared to add my weapon to the arch through which a young couple were to walk in a few moments. But the wedding never came off. It seems that the man who was to form half of that team was being jilted . . ."

Brand's face tightened just a trifle and he looked hard at the man across the table from him, but said nothing. Instead, queerly, the song's second verse registered in his ears, and he listened to it as he studied Ormandy's eyes.

*"Nowhere in all the system
You'll find a girl like she;
And you can bet your ray gun
That she's the one for me!"*

Ormandy's voice went on:

"That man was just a lieutenant in the space-patrol then. I was also one, but I had other interests. They had something to do with a situation that was only beginning then. I didn't know at the time that the man who was being jilted would be so bitter about it that he'd become a thorn in my side later on. Of course the interests which I planned were then in their infancy. Today they are quite well advanced . . ."

*"Her hair is like the ghostweed
That drifts on Venus' sea.
From top to toe a figure
As perfect as can be."*

"It would be a shame to let any possible harm come to them now. So that is why you are looking into the muzzle of a very efficient little steam-gun right now, Mr. Martin Brand. 'Suicide' Martin Brand, I believe is the popular designation, which, at the moment, is quite appropriate indeed."

"Perhaps," agreed Brand. "I've gotten to depend on my luck so much that I often stick my head into the lion's mouth like this. Someday it's going to make me careless."

"Like now?" questioned Ormandy softly.

"Maybe. But how'd you spot me?" Ormandy frowned.

"Recognized you, of course," he snapped.

"That's a lie," said Brand. "In the first place you've never seen me before, and in the second place you never were at any wedding. Every

one of the boys in that line, with or without swords, were my friends. All except the one who ran off with my girl, cracked up with her, and ran off like a rat, leaving her to a life of insanity. And thirdly, I don't look like Martin Brand at all. I'm a mess of plastic."

Ormandy looked at him a moment, then he laughed contemptuously.

"You're smart, Brand and a liar. But so what? Right now you're going to walk out of here with me, climb into the black aero-cab directly in front, and sit tight. The driver knows me quite well. In fact, you might say he's a friend. He'll never remember having taken a fare anywhere tonight, especially a prospector named Ed Barnes, whom nobody'll ever see again. Not when his body drops into Black Hole."

"Black Hole?"

"That's the crater that goes nowhere that anybody's ever been able to discover—and came back alive."

"Oh, I see."

Brand's eyes strayed a split second over Ormandy's shoulder, and saw with surprise that the girl was gone. Her drink stood on the table at which she'd been seated. It was untouched.

"Get up," ordered Ormandy. "The drinks are on me. Just walk out."

Brand got up. He nodded casually to the doorman as he walked past. Ormandy was a few paces behind. Outside, Brand waited.

"That cab," indicated Ormandy.

Brand glanced around carefully. In a doorway to one side of the brilliantly lit marquee of the Star Club he saw a glint of red. There was

a slight hiss, a tiny white lance of light came from the doorway, and ended in the temple of his captor. Ormandy sighed, slid gently to the walk, and dropped the steam-gun from his nerveless palm.

Brand stooped, scooped it up, whipped open the door of the aerocab, and trained the weapon on the startled driver.

"Start going places," he snapped. "Fast!"

He leaped in, turned to see the figure of the mysterious girl in the doorway. He saw her return a steam-gun to her bodice, then disappear into the Star Club's side door once more. On the walk before the cafe the body of Ormandy lay like an ink-blot. For the instant no one was in sight, then the doorman came running out, and several pedestrians began to converge on the corpse. Then the scene vanished from view as the aerocab lifted, shot into the darkness over the city.

* * *

The girl sitting in the easy chair in the solarium was staring blankly at the landscape that spread out before her beyond the wide-flung windows admitting the morning sun and air.

Behind her an ornate radio played softly, rendering the symphonic tone poem, *Rakastava*, of Sibelius. Its notes were muted, low, distant. They were soothing, restful. And the girl who sat so still seemed lost in them. Her eyes were fixed on nothing, her body relaxed. Yet, beneath the calm exterior there was a strange tension

that betrayed itself in tiny, tense wrinkles around her eyes, on the bridge of her nose, and especially in the nervous twitching of the fingers of one hand.

Moving softly, furtively around the room, an aproned girl dusted furniture with almost fearful industriousness. Often she glanced quickly at the quiet figure in the easy chair, then snatched her attention away again to return to her work.

Someone appeared in the doorway. The maid glanced up.

"Good morning," said the newcomer, drawing a brilliant robe around her figure, waiting expectantly for an answer. None came from the girl in the chair, but the maid rushed forward on tiptoe, one startled finger to her lips in an unmistakable gesture.

"*Quiet!*" she hissed. "Do you want to make her violent again?"

"Oh, shush, Olga," said the visitor, pushing back a lock of graying hair from her more than middle-aged face. "She isn't going to be violent. She's no more crazy than I am—or . . ." she fixed a stern glance on Olga's fear-ridden face, ". . . or you." Olga reddened, and returned flustered to her silent pursuit of dust that didn't exist. Under her breath she mumbled.

"Crazy? Miss Pennyfeather, you're *insane!*"

If Miss Pennyfeather heard, she gave no indication. Instead she walked over to the girl in the easy chair and sat down on the window ledge directly before her, craning her neck to bring her gaze directly into line with the girl's blank stare. For

a long moment she peered.

"Good morning, Estelle," she said.

There was no answer. Miss Pennyfeather looked irritated. She inched herself more directly in line with Estelle Carter's gaze, rising to a half-sitting position that gave her the appearance of a poised scarecrow.

There was no evidence that Estelle saw her visitor. Miss Pennyfeather became more irritated. She reached out a hand to still the fingers of the girl's hand, then sat back again, and a judicious look crossed her face.

"It's that music," she decided. "It's too spiritless. We must have something with fire, something to wake us." She got up, walked over to the radio and snapped a switch.

"This is better! *The Ride of the Valkyries*, from *Die Walküre*, by Richard Wagner!" She read the title with gusto. "This will brighten us up!"

She inserted the record, snapped a new switch. Then she turned up the volume slightly and returned to her seat on the window ledge. She tossed a defiant stare at Olga, who had been standing disapprovingly in one position while Miss Pennyfeather launched her campaign for "brightening things up."

"Go about your work, Olga," she said sharply. "That radio is simply filthy with dust." She rubbed her fingers on her skirt with distaste.

Olga frowned and returned to the chair on which she had been working, but she cast an exploratory glance at the radio and squinted.

The strains of the Wagnerian music began swelling through the

room, building up to crashing chords. Miss Pennyfeather sat patiently waiting for her "brightening up" efforts to take effect on her victim.

"Those stars keep racing around," said Estelle abstractedly. "And I hate racers."

Miss Pennyfeather lifted her eyebrows.

"Stars?" she asked. "Where do you see stars racing?"

Estelle's eyes focused on her visitor's face, as if she were seeing her for the first time.

"I don't see them," she said. "He's a star. A star racer. He's won so many medals. But he always runs away. He's a coward, and I hate him."

"Don't you love anybody?" asked Miss Pennyfeather.

"No. Men are such fools."

"Hasn't anybody ever loved you?"

Estelle laughed.

"Certainly . . . but I didn't love him. He wanted to buy a little house and tie me down in it. He was so old-fashioned. He knew how to kiss, and that's all I wanted . . ."

The girl's gaiety vanished suddenly, and she leaned forward in her chair. An anxious look came over her features.

"I hear his voice!" she exclaimed.

Miss Pennyfeather frowned.

"The only men here are Doctor Allen and Doctor Deakin," she said, "and you couldn't hear any voices outside anyway. The music is getting too loud."

Estelle relaxed again, and her fingers resumed the twitching motion.

Behind them Olga neared the

radio. She peered at it closely.

"Filthy with dust!" she whispered. She began polishing it with her cloth, an ecstatic look in her eyes. Her fingers accidentally touched the volume control, turning it over to full strength . . .

With startling suddenness the music roared out deafeningly. The climactic chords of the tremendous selection shook the walls.

Estelle Carter leaped from her chair. Her shrill scream rocketed through the air, even above the blasting radio. Her face was a mask of shock and surprise and terror. She ran back and forth, as though seeking an escape, her hands clasped over her ears, and she screamed again and again.

"Martin! *Martin!*"

Miss Pennyfeather looked as though she'd been struck by lightning, Olga crumpled to the floor next to the radio, crying in hysteria.

Estelle shrieked once more, then fell to the floor in a faint.

Miss Pennyfeather leaped into action. With terror in her face, she rushed through the doorway, colliding with the form of Doctor Deakin. She recovered, and rushed on down the hall, passed Doctor Allen with averted eyes, and turned into her room.

"Turn off that radio!" shouted Doctor Allen, reaching the solarium. "Good God, there's no telling what this shock will do to Miss Carter!"

The blasting thunder of the music was cut off abruptly, and only the sobs of the maid filled the room.

"Get Olga out of here, Deakin,"

directed Doctor Allen. "I'll take care of Miss Carter. I'm afraid this might be serious. It's enough to kill her, or cure her . . ."

Several days later the two men faced each other in their office.

"What's the verdict, Allen?"

Doctor Allen leaned back in his chair.

"Cured! Completely cured! That shock absolutely counteracted the one which deranged her mind in the accident. She's as sane as you or I, and she knows it. She has a fine mind, or she couldn't have taken the revelations of the past few days without suffering a breakdown. It's quite a shock to realize that you've been insane for ten years."

"You're going to release her?"

"Certainly. Fortunately she has quite a sum still in her fund, that is being turned over to her. I have no doubt but what she'll find a place for herself without difficulty. She's a clever girl—even brilliant. I've been amazed at the extent of her knowledge and her intelligence rating."

"You don't fear a relapse?"

Allen shook his head.

"No," he said slowly, "I don't. There's something pretty solid in her mind. Perhaps the combination of those two shocks has accomplished something that might not otherwise have been possible. She's as cold and analytical as a mathematics machine. If anything, she's too sane. Her emotions are under a powerful mental control. What she really needs is the outside world. I might even hope

that she'd fall in love, although the way she's constituted now, I'd hardly think that was possible. Anyway, she's leaving us today."

"Where's she going?"

"Says she has hopes of a business contact with a fellow named Jeffry Killian."

"Jeffry Killian! Why that's the man she cracked up with. He's dead—drowned in the wreck!"

"Eh!" exclaimed Doctor Allen, startled. "Eh!"

He settled back in his chair, a puzzled look on his face, then, after a moment, it cleared.

"That's too bad," he said, "but maybe it has its compensations. After all, sorrow is akin to love—it's an emotion. And that's what she needs. Once emotion returns to her, she'll be a pretty fine woman. I think I'll just let her go, and find out about Killian for herself. She can certainly take the shock, and it might soften her nervous system up a bit."

"It might . . ." said his companion dubiously. "Perhaps it might . . ."

* * *

Martin Brand poked the steam-gun into the aero-car driver's back with a vicious jab.

"Was the guy back there your boss?"

"No. I'm just a taxi driver."

"You lie! I know all about this set-up, and I'm here to break it. I intend to break it!"

The driver turned half around.

"What set-up?" he asked. "I ain't in no set-up . . ."

"Keep on driving, and face front,"

ordered Brand grimly, "and make for the Black Hole. We've got a little date there."

He saw the red neck of the driver go pale.

"What you going to do?" he quavered.

"Kill you," said Brand laconically.

He saw the driver's knuckles go white on the steering wheel, but the face remained rigidly toward the front. The aero-cab drove on through the darkness beyond the city, through the artificial atmosphere of the great cavern. Pockmarked everywhere were great black areas that betokened uninhabited areas, and bright spots that indicated cities. To one side, the side facing the sun, several bright spots indicated craters that extended straight through the crust, similar to the giant one which provided the main access to the moon's interior down which Brand had come in the freighter.

Dimly, across the black void above them, paths of light indicated the sun's beams. In the windless interior, no dust floated, and dust motes did not break up the beams and make them the brilliant shafts they are in Earth caves.

Only opposite the crater through which the beams entered did the sun's rays add any appreciable light to this stygian inner-world. There, brilliant white spots outglowed the artificial light of cities, but were easily confused with the cities.

Brand knew had they been further out from the surface he could have seen the huge Black Hole that was their destination. It might be on the

near up-curving horizon in almost any direction, and Brand felt with certainty that the driver of the aero-cab was *not* going toward it. He'd seen him cautiously, with extreme slowness, so as not to make it noticeable, change his course several times. And Brand knew this was just a means of determining if he, Brand, knew where the Black Hole was.

With an inner smile playing about his lips Brand waited, eyes and ears open, on the alert.

The driver indicated a black area just ahead.

"There is the beginning of the Black Hole crater," he said. "What do you intend to do with me now?"

"Go directly over it," Brand said, "and then drop down into it slowly."

The man complied, and the little vessel dropped slowly down in a direct vertical.

Brand seemed to be intently watching the crater walls, shrouded in blackness, but in reality, his attention was fixed on the driver. He saw the slow tensing of the tiny muscles in the fingers of his right hand as they drew near to a certain outcropping of rock that formed a rather wide ledge. Here was a dim glow, and Brand saw that even a space ship could land on the ledge with room to spare. But their aero-car was several hundred yards out from it, and descending very slowly.

Suddenly, Brand acted. He leaped forward, raised the steam-gun, brought it down on the driver's head just as the man's right hand shot out toward a button on the dash. The

driver uttered a little moan, slumped over the wheel. The aero-car began a whistling dive down into the crater darkness.

Brand wrestled the inert body away from the control seat and took over. In a moment he had halted the downward dive, bore the ship off in a slanting zoom away from the danger of crashing the walls, then hung for a moment, getting his bearings.

Above him was the landing ledge he had seen before. Certain that he hadn't lost the clue it had given him, Brand began to drop the ship slowly again. Into pitch darkness they went. Brand kept one ear cocked to the stertorous breathing of the driver, who was still unconscious. Any change in it would indicate returning consciousness.

Abruptly the aero-car bumped solid rock. Brand turned off the motors. A quick flash of the lights, on dim, showed that he had reached the floor of this particular pit. It was certainly not the Black Hole. In all, it was perhaps three miles deep, and small in diameter at the base. He placed a small package in the man's pocket, searched him for weapons, found none, and after a moment of thought left a small flashlight. It was a weak, two-celled affair, and its beam would penetrate the gloom only a few feet. He dragged the unconscious man from the cab.

Then Brand stepped back into the aero-cab and started up the shaft of the crater toward the ledge above.

He drove the ship silently down toward the far end of the great ledge,

landed in pitch darkness close to the crater wall, under a slight overhang of rock. There he turned off the motors and left the ship.

Slowly, he made his way through the inky blackness on foot, carefully feeling his way along the rocky wall, extending an exploratory foot forward before taking each step. He proceeded in this manner for nearly an hour.

The dim light on the ledge grew stronger, and suddenly Brand discovered the reason for it. Here and there, in patches on the rock wall, a dully-luminous paint had been splashed. His hunch had been right. The driver of the aero-cab had been intent on flashing on all the lights of his cab thereby attracting attention, and being rescued from his plight. He had firmly believed that Brand intended to kill him, and had tried to save his life—and in so doing had betrayed the hiding place of the men Brand was seeking.

Here in this pit, somewhere along this ledge, there must be an opening big enough to admit space ships. An opening big enough to be used as a base for the fifth-column activities Brand sought to uncover and destroy.

Perhaps now, at last, he would come to grips with the master criminal, the Martian genius who was building up the secret springboard for an all-out offensive against Earth. The offensive that Earth authorities and Earth people alike scoffed at, because they denied the possibility of an invasion across 41,000,000 to 134,000,000 miles of space.

He went on, now able to see dimly

in the phosphorescent glow of the luminous-paint splotches. He no longer had to feel his way, held his steam-gun in readiness prepared for any surprise.

Here, he felt sure, judging from the covert actions of the aero-cab driver, he could expect to find sentries. At least he knew he'd find someone to whom a bright light would have meant apprehensive action.

Alert, he went on, his soles grinding softly in the sandy pumice of the ledge-floor. Before him he saw a black area in the cliff wall. It was a cavern opening, and on both sides of it were groups of heavy boulders. Behind them several men could have hidden very easily.

Brand dropped down and crawled along on his belly, taking advantage of every possible concealment. There was no noise, but to Brand the scuff of his own body in the sand sounded almost thunderous.

It was with surprise that he stopped his progress and became rigidly immobile at the sight of a dark figure seated with his back against a rock. The man was smoking a cigarette, and the tip of it glowed red as he dragged on it. His face was illuminated, and Brand's pulse leaped.

A Martian!

He'd found the opening. There was no doubt that this was the hiding place of a part of the fifth column Mars was establishing on Luna. This man was a guard. Across his knees was a long atom-rifle, one that could easily shoot down an aero-car at a distance of several miles. Brand knew the weapon, a deadly invention

of Earth, which had been stolen by spies and duplicated in Martian factories. It had been used to potent advantage in the Martian invasion of Calisto. It had telescopic sights that were so perfect, and had so great a range that even the astronomers marvelled at them.

The Martian seemed certain that his duty was an unnecessary one. That an intruder would find this ledge or attempt to land on it was preposterous to him. Brand glanced out into the void of the interior of Luna, and saw that any ship without lights would be perfectly invisible against the black curtain. That is, unless it chanced to cross a spot of light that betokened a city on the other side, or blundered into one of the shafts of sunlight that lanced almost invisibly across the cavern. It was obvious that the guard had not seen the aero-cab descend. Nor could he see a light from the crater bottom, because it would be necessary for him to go directly to the ledge termination and peer over.

Slowly Brand crept forward, his gun in hand. The guard smoked his cigarette down, flicked it away into the darkness, then he climbed slowly to his feet. His seven feet of height towered over Brand, who froze motionless again. The guard relaxed the hold on his rifle, stretched his great shoulders and yawned.

Brand rose slowly to his feet and advanced. A pebble crunched beneath his feet.

The guard whirled, his gun came up with amazing swiftness, the muz-

le pointing directly at Brand's body. Startled by the dexterity of the fellow's movements, Brand had time to do no more than press the trigger of his steam-gun. A white lance leaped out, striking the Martian in the abdomen. The Martian doubled over in agony, but retained his footing, bringing his gun once more into line.

Brand shot again, swiftly, surely, and the steam lance ended its trail of death directly between the guard's eyes. Like an empty sack of brittle burlap which refused to flatten out, the Martian's fragile body collapsed. He lay motionless on the pumice, dark blood oozing from the wound in his head.

"He wasn't so off-guard at that," muttered Brand. "And it wasn't so good for him. It cost him his life. If I could have sneaked by . . ."

But then he laughed.

"What am I feeling sorry for? These fellows intend to murder millions on Earth, if we give them the chance!"

He stepped over to the body, searched it. He found nothing but a pack of cigarettes, which he pocketed, some matches, a second steam-gun in a holster, and a belt of ammunition. He picked up the atom-gun, hefted its long length, then retraced his steps toward his ship some hundred yards, and cached his loot along the base of the cliff-wall.

He returned and lifting the Martian's body, he carried it to the edge of the ledge and hurled it over.

Then, all traces of his activities having been removed, he made his way into the black opening of the

cave. As he rounded a bend, a source of illumination became visible, and he saw that ahead there was a broad ending of the tunnel, plus several branching tunnels that led off at angles. Obviously, this was a complex system of caves and tunnels—an ideal hiding place for Martian agents and Lunarian fifth-columnists.

Brand crept forward, following the illumination, his nerves tense with caution. He progressed several hundred yards before the illumination became bright enough for him to follow without feeling for his footing. He could now see the rock underfoot, and he realized that this was no artificial illumination, but a natural glow that emanated from the rock itself.

So far he had seen no signs of the human occupancy that he sought, and his brows furrowed in puzzlement. Why bury themselves so deeply? Obviously, farther ahead, there was a huge cave, lighted with phosphorescence, but peering at the tunnel floor, Brand could see no traces of any passage through the sand and scattered pumice. In fact, his own footprints showed clearly and distinctly.

Brand halted. Something was wrong about this. If the enemy used this tunnel as a hideout, they either carefully obliterated their trail, or entered by another route. Perhaps the right way through was one of those diverging tunnels behind him? . . . But they had not been illuminated. The light had drawn him here.

Brand went ahead more slowly, came into the main cavern, a large

place, perhaps several miles in diameter. One glance was enough to tell him it was entirely empty. There was no possible place in this huge lava-bubble where anything as large as a rat could have hidden.

'Wrong trail!' exclaimed Brand in annoyance. His voice echoed and re-echoed from the walls of the cave with startling repetition. Brand clenched his lips shut in tight alarm, as those sounds might echo for miles through these tunnels.

When silence descended again, Brand took a last look. He saw a tiny black opening in the wall several hundred feet away, and walked toward it cautiously. It led into pitch darkness.

Was this the way? Was he on the right trail at that?

He stepped inside, walked on into gloom that grew blacker, until with a turning of the passage it became complete. Once more he was forced to feel his way along. After a time, the sound of his footsteps ceased abruptly to echo back to him, and became almost soundless. He halted. He had emerged into a space more vast than any he had yet been in. That was obvious. About him was the atmosphere, the feeling, of sheer immensity, of empty distance.

There were no tunnel walls to guide him, he realized that another step might plunge him into a bottomless pit. Very obviously this was not the hiding place of the people he was seeking. Better retrace his steps . . .

A rustle out of the darkness brought him around in sudden alert, his gun ready. Looming over him,

swooping down with incredible speed, was a shadowy monster, giant-winged, reptile-bodied. It glowed with a pale violet radiance all its own, giving the appearance of a ghostly and very huge bat. Brand recognized it instantly, although this was his first sight of such a creature. This was the dreaded lu-bat of Luna's caves attacking him!

Desperately, he raised his steam-gun, trained it on the body, depressed the trigger and held it there. The white lance leaped out, played over the luminous violet of the body, but apparently nothing was happening. The monster didn't veer in its downward course. Brand could hear the whistle of wind as it planed down at him now. He kept the steam-gun pouring out its lance.

Suddenly, with devastating effect, the white lance took effect. With a tremendous roar, and a blinding flash of light, the lu-bat exploded. Brilliantly flaring fragments of it scattered and fell like meteors, or star-shells on a battle-front, into a tremendous crater.

Brand saw that he was within yards of the edge of this vast depression in the moon's inner surface. He also saw that there was apparently no other side, even in the brilliant white light that came from the flaming fragments of the lu-bat. Undoubtedly his steam-gun's intensely hot ray had caused a chemical combustion in the gaseous interior of the lu-bat, releasing the radioactive elements of its make-up in flaming pyrotechnics.

But the other things that Brand saw in the brilliant light made the

immensity of the depths before him inconsequential. He realized that he stood now on the rim of the famed Black Hole of Luna, the crater that had no bottom and had never been safely explored. Floating there under a ledge, concealed from above, but starkly revealed in the brilliant white light that was dying now as the lu-bat disappeared miles below still falling, was a giant space battleship! Behind it was another—and behind that a third. Brand could see no more, because darkness became complete. But registered on his dazed retina was the unmistakable identity of these super-warships. They were Martian!

Now a brilliant light bathed Brand in its rays and a voice behind him said:

"Up with the hands, Mister! And drop that gun."

Brand turned slowly, dropped his steam-gun to the pumice at his feet. He tried to see beyond the bright flashlight trained on him, but couldn't.

"That's the first time I've ever seen a lu-bat knocked down with a steam-gun," said the voice. "Usually it takes a heavy atom-rifle to get 'em. Never been tried with a steam-gun before, as far as I know. It would be too silly to try, or would have been up to now. It seems, handled right, they do a pretty fancy job."

Brand was silent, waiting for his captor to make a move.

"Who are you?" asked the man behind the flashlight.

"Robert Wales," said Brand.

"What are you doing here?"

"Isn't that a rather silly question to ask?" Brand put in. "Judging from what I saw anchored out there . . ." he waved a hand in the direction of the Martian battleships he'd seen huddled against the crater wall ". . . I have a faint hunch my business here is of the same nature as yours."

"Judging from what you saw anchored out there," said his captor, "you haven't any business of *any* nature that you're going to be doing."

The man with the flashlight moved around behind Brand, and in the light, Brand saw a pathway leading toward an opening other than the one by which he had reached the Black Hole.

"Walk that way, ahead of me," directed the voice behind the flashlight. "We'll have a little business discussion with some people I know . . ."

Brand began moving. They moved for several hundred yards, then came to a door built into the tunnel. A guard peered forth, then the door opened.

"What you got there, Joe?" asked the guard, eyeing Brand.

"A guy I found out in the Black Hole, snooping around. He just shot down a lu-bat with a steam-gun. You should have seen the fireworks. Most amazing damn thing I ever saw. Lit up the whole crater . . ."

"Lit it up?"

"Yeah, for miles."

"Then . . ."

"Sure. I'm taking him to Jeff. He's seen too much, and besides, he ain't a lu-bat hunter. No lu-bat hunter ever went after those babies

with a steam-gun."

"I'll say," grunted the guard. "But then, nobody ever shot one down with a steam-gun either, until now!" There was frank admiration in the soldier's face.

Brand's captor ordered him ahead, and they advanced into a warm, lighted series of caverns. Down several branches, Brand saw many men, most of them in the uniform of the space-navy of Mars. His lips tightened at the sight.

"Commander Wilson," he muttered under his breath, "this isn't any sabotage, any fifth-column . . . it's a full-scale invasion, practically ready to go!"

"What's that you said?" asked the guard sharply.

"I said this's a pretty fancy set-up."

"Yea, fancier than you think . . . turn right, in that next room."

Brand obeyed the sudden order, entered a small room where two more guards stood, rifles in hand, rigid at attention. There was a distinct military pose to their bearing—but they were Earthmen.

Brand's captor saluted.

"Sewell, reporting to Commander Killian with a captive," he said.

Brand whirled on the man.

"Killian!" he exclaimed. "Commander Killian!"

"Of course. He's in charge here. About-face, and march in. You'll be glad to see him, no doubt, if he's an old friend of yours—and in the same business!" The fellow who called himself Sewell grinned mockingly.

One of the guards opened the door, and Brand stepped through, his jaw tense, his teeth biting together so hard his jaw hurt. In his mind one raging thought flamed. *Jeffry Killian was the man he sought. Jeffry Killian was the mastermind, the arch criminal, the power behind the treachery on Lunat!*

He faced the man who sat behind an ornate desk, dressed in a plain khaki uniform without insignia of any kind.

"Come to deliver your message to the boss?" queried Jeffry Killian softly.

"No!" said Brand savagely. "I've come to kill you! And the only thing that'll prevent me is for you to kill me first."

Jeffry Killian rose to his feet. His face was cold now.

"That can be arranged," he snapped. "I promise you that you will die, but first, I have a few things I want to talk over with you."

"Talk away!" blazed Brand, reeling under the wave of hate that was washing over him now. "I've got some talking to do myself. Some things I've been saving up to say for ten years . . ." He choked. "You scummy, cowardly, yellow rat!"

Killian stepped out from behind the desk, signaled covertly, and Brand found both his arms grasped by the two guards. Then Killian lashed out with a fist, flush to Brand's face.

Brand reeled under the blow. Another smashing punch sent him to his knees. He clambered back up again, eyes blazing, lips tight, but silent. At the look in his eyes, Killian

stepped back, shrugged.

"That'll teach you to keep your mouth shut," he said.

He turned to Sewell.

"What's your report?"

"I found him on the edge of the Black Hole. He was attacked by a lu-bat. Shot it down with a steam-gun."

"Steam-gun!"

"Yes. Kept it trained on the body, and something must've happened inside. It blew up and burned with the brightest light you ever saw. Lit up the whole crater for miles around. This gave him a good look at what we got hid out there. So I stepped in and stuck him up. He said his name was Robert Wales. Also said his business was the same as ours."

Killian laughed grimly.

"Sure it is. He's a spy, but for the other side. You can go now, Sewell. And good work. I'll see that you get a captaincy out of this."

"Thank you, sir," said Sewell, and saluting, turned and went out.

Killian eyed Brand a moment.

"Just how'd you find me?" he asked.

Brand laughed.

"By the stink!"

Killian tensed, then smiled.

"Pretty crude, Boy Scout," he sneered. "About the answer I'd expect from a man of your intelligence. You never were good at anything that took any special ability outside of sheer luck. But you can bet your bottom dollar that your luck's run out now! You aren't going to get out of this with your skin. And besides,

isn't that what you've always claimed you wanted? Bellyaching all over the solar system about pulling Death's tail? 'Suicide' Martin Brand! That's a laugh. And all because of a woman. How a guy with as little balance as that ever got old enough to vote, is beyond me."

Killian sat down again.

"By the way, whatever happened to Estelle?"

Brand's face went white.

"You know damn well what happened to her! You cracked her up, showing off those insane racing stunts of yours. Then when you thought you'd killed her, you thought of me, and ran like a yellow cur. Later you must have found out she'd gone insane, so you never did come back. Big enough to take a girl, but not to stay when she needed you. That's where you showed your true colors. Daredevil racer, eh? You go so fast because you're afraid of your own shadow!

"I'd never have done anything to you. If you were what Estelle wanted, that would have satisfied me. I know now it was she who sent that telegram, not you. Even you couldn't have had the colossal ego to call yourself a man, much less the best one. But at that, I guess Estelle got the kind of a man she deserved . . ."

Brand stopped, bit his lip. Even now the hurt of ten years ago bit deep.

Killian seemed curiously unmoved by this tirade. Instead a sneering smile played around his mouth.

Brand frowned. There was something here that he couldn't under-

stand.

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked slowly.

"Kill you, of course," said Killian. "But not right away. I've got a few things in mind . . ."

"What about those ships out there?" Brand asked bluntly, waving a hand in the direction from which he'd come.

Killian laughed.

"A little hell, for Earth," he sneered. "No harm in telling you. In fact, I think I'll enjoy telling you. And when I say a 'little' hell, I mean just that. What you saw is just a sample. We've spent ten years preparing and we're just about ready. Even the Lunarians don't suspect a single thing, outside of the usual song they've been singing to deaf-and-dumb Earth congressmen for years, about taking the rap as buffer state between Earth and Mars in case of an invasion. *Invasion!* This isn't going to be an invasion, it's going to be a picnic!"

Brand's face was pale. For the first time in ten years he called upon his luck in real earnest. For the first time in ten years he *didn't* want to die.

"Just one chance . . ." he murmured. The almost inaudible plea was a prayer.

"What?" asked Killian sharply. "What'd you say?"

Brand stared at him, his lips tight, and said nothing.

Killian flushed. Then he rose to his feet.

"Take him out, boys," he said. "Lock him up in the cell, and I'll

take care of him later."

The two guardsmen marched Brand between them, out of the door and down the tunnel. They took several turns, during which Brand saw many more soldiers, both Earthmen and Martian. Here and there he saw a Lunarian, also in Martian uniform. It turned his stomach. This was a hotbed of traitors, but the seriousness of it all was just beginning to strike home.

The inside of the moon was the invasion base that Commander Wilson had feared it might become. It was not a possibility, but an actual, existing, and extremely powerful base, ready for action.

Luna wouldn't be invaded from space, which was constantly watched by the Luna space fleet and the Lunarian army, but from her own bowels—treacherously, swiftly, completely. Luna wouldn't have a chance, and Earth would then be helpless. She couldn't defend all of her great area from attack which could be directed at any particular spot in a few hours' notice.

"Just one chance!" prayed Brand. "I've got to get away!" His whisper was inaudible this time.

In a few moments the guards halted him before a barred door, opened it, thrust him inside. They locked it and one of them took up station outside, while the other returned.

Brand found himself in a rather large cave, which led back into darkness for quite some distance, and he explored it thoroughly. There was an end to it, but no other exit. His

prison was indeed an effective one.

He sat down and his thoughts raced, but the more he thought, the more hopeless things became. Jeffry Killian held all the cards, and through him, Mars held a winning hand. There was no telling when the blow would fall, but it seemed certain that it would be soon.

"Got to make a break for it," he muttered. "As soon as they take me out of here . . . even suicide is better than letting this happen!"

His face became grim. He realized that at last the luck of 'Suicide' Martin Brand had become just that . . . luck. Only this time it was the other kind.

Outside the prison door came the sound of a short, sharp scuffle, a heavy thudding blow, and the sound of a falling body.

Brand leaped to his feet, listening intently.

The key grated in the lock, and the door swung open. A shadowy figure entered, came toward him.

"Martin?" came the low call, melodious, haunting, familiar.

Brand froze, his blood congealed in his veins.

"Martin?" came the voice again. "Are you here? Please answer me, Martin."

Brand stumbled forward, his voice a hoarse croak of amazement, of wonder, of stunned surprise.

"Estelle!" he gasped. "Oh, my God, Estelle! It isn't . . ."

Now her soft hands were in his, and soft lips pressed swiftly, hurriedly, anxiously against his own.

"It is!" she whispered. "I've come

back to you. Thank God, Martin, that I found you in time. I've been eating my heart out, wanting to tell you what a fool I've been, and how horribly sorry . . ."

"Estelle!" he choked out, reeling beneath the shock of it all. "You . . . you're all right? You aren't . . .?"

"No," she said softly. "I'm not . . . insane any more."

Her hands tugged at him.

"Come quickly," she begged. "We've got to get out of here, before Jeffry finds out . . ."

He allowed himself to be led out of the prison, past the unconscious body of the guard.

"Jeffry?" he mumbled. "Does he know . . . but how . . . I don't understand . . ."

"Never mind all that now!" pleaded Estelle Carter. "I'll explain later. Right now we've got to get away. Got to! Come . . . this way. I know a way out."

Her warm hand in Martin Brand's sent a strange shock to all his nerve centers. He was dazed, groping about in his mind for an explanation to this miracle that had come to him out of the dark.

"Estelle," he whispered, still unbelieving. "I don't understand . . ."

"Never mind," she said tensely. "You've got to get away. Jeffry will certainly kill you."

They came to a dark opening in the basalt wall. She slipped into it and Brand followed. They groped through inky darkness for nearly a half-hour, then a hollow booming echoed out of the distance from behind them.

"The alarm," gasped Estelle.

"They've discovered your escape! Oh, quickly! We've got to get out of this tunnel . . ."

She switched on a small flashlight and in its light, began a stumbling run down the uneven floor. Behind them, the dull booming of the alarm like a huge drum, or a bell that has cracked, throbbed incessantly. Added to it were faint shouts, hollow and eerie because of the enclosed spaces.

Suddenly, the tunnel opened on a narrow ledge, and beyond the light of the flash, Brand could see the abrupt blackness and the awful gulf that indicated the Black Hole. Out there, hanging in the darkness were those three—or more—giant Martian battleships, waiting to surge up and out into space in destructive attack on Earth.

Estelle flicked off the flashlight's beam and left them in total darkness once more. Out here the booming of the alarm shrank to almost soundless proportions, swallowed in the vastness of the emptiness around them.

"Where are we going?" Brand asked.

"There are several small cruisers from the battleships anchored along the ledge, further down. If you can reach one of them, you can escape. They'll never find you in the crater."

Brand stopped dead in his tracks. He reached out in the darkness and clutched Estelle's arm, drawing her closer to him.

"What's all this emphasis on me?" he demanded. "If I do any escaping, you're going along."

He felt, rather than saw, her head shake.

"No, Martin, please. I must stay. Nobody will know it was I who helped you escape . . ."

Brand gasped.

"They know you're here?"

"Yes," she said lowly. "I realize it's hard to understand, but it's too long a story to tell you now. I came here, looking for Jeffry. I remembered, even after ten years . . ." she hesitated and he felt her shudder. ". . . ten years in that mad house, where to contact certain persons, and I got word to him. Then, I came . . ."

He stiffened and his voice grew cold.

"You came back to *him*!" he exclaimed roughly.

She stepped close, abruptly, and her warm body pressed against his and her arms went around his neck. Her breath was hot and sweet in his face.

"No!" she said fiercely. "Please, no! Don't believe that. But he left me to die, ran away like a coward. He'll pay for that! *That's* why I came to him. He thinks I love him, but he'll know very soon that I don't!"

Estelle's lips met Brand's and pressed fiercely, passionately. Almost without conscious volition, he responded, clutching her in his arms tightly, then he pushed her away.

"My God!" he said hoarsely. "What's happened to you? You can't do that! You come with me. We'll get him another way. When I get back to Commander Wilson with the news I've got to tell him, there'll

be action, *pronto*. We'll bottle up this invasion fleet, and smash 'em . . ."

She stood straight before him.

"No," she said firmly. "I'm not going with you. You can believe what you want about me. I know I treated you shamefully, and I know I deserved to lose your love. But whether or not I ever win it back again, I am going to pay off Jeffry Killian for what he did to me. You, nor anyone else is going to stop me. Another few minutes, and they'll realize we aren't in the caves, and they'll come out here. If they find us . . ."

She whirled and he heard her making her way along the rocky wall. Dazed by the cold fury and deliberate intent in her voice, Brand followed, hugging the rough basalt to avoid pitching into the Black Hole's depths.

Something inside him felt like a lump of ice. It was almost a sense of fear—fear of this woman he had once loved, who had come to him now with such intense bitterness that he was appalled. Surging through him, also, was a hot emotion that he fought helplessly to thrust down. It made him speak to her now . . .

"Estelle . . ." he choked.

She stopped. His arms closed around her convulsively . . .

"Estelle," he said hoarsely. "Is it really you? Are you all right?"

For an instant she was still in his arms, then she spoke.

"Don't be a fool," she said coldly. "After what I did to you, are you going to let my appeal sway your reason? If, after this is all over, I can prove to you by other means that I deserve you, maybe . . ." her voice

softened an instant, then hardened again. "How can you be so stupid as to think I might not betray you once more? Perhaps I have other motives, not good for you at all, in helping you to escape. Perhaps I intend only to do harm to Jeffry Killian by releasing you, simply because it wouldn't be a good thing for him for you to get away. I tell you, I hate him, and I intend to pay him off!"

He gasped, but he had no answer to this amazing series of statements. Slowly he withdrew his arms from around her.

"Maybe you're right," he said with a curious inflection in his tone. What she had just said somehow went against his grain. It made him feel like a puppet, a helpless bystander, and placed her before him as a force that would sway him as it willed. Suddenly, he rebelled.

"Yes," he said. "Maybe you *are* right. Since the job I'm doing here is bigger than either of us, and certainly bigger than your personal vengeance, I'm going to take you at your word. Besides, I think my score against Killian is bigger than yours, and I say he's mine! I swore I'd get him, and I will. Show me those cruisers."

Brand fought down the almost overpowering desire to believe what he wanted to believe about this amazingly warm and human, yet terrifyingly chilling woman before him. But they were there, those emotions, and they brought back that curious exaltation that he always felt when going into battle. Only this time it

wasn't the bitter exaltation of the past ten years paced by the maddening thunder of Wagner's music. The thunder was in his blood, in a sudden uncontrollable beating of his heart. All at once he grinned in the dark . . .

Up from the immensity beside them shot a bright spark, leaving a trail of lesser sparks behind it that died as they drifted. Abruptly a brilliant light burst forth, and a glare filled the whole crater, lighting the walls about them with eye-blinding brilliance.

"Run!" Estelle burst out. "They've shot up a flare from the battleship!"

From the tunnel behind them came shouts, but as Brand turned, no one was in sight. They ran. Plainly revealed before them, anchored to wooden docks fastened to the sheer crater wall, were several small cruisers.

They reached them as a group of men burst from the tunnel. Estelle was ahead, and out of their sight. But they saw Brand, and a barrage of white lances leaped out at him from their steam guns. The range was too far, and they fell short.

Brand's boots rang on the planks of the dock, and he ran toward Estelle. He reached out for her.

"Now," he panted. "You're getting in with me and we're off . . ."

She slipped out of his grasp. In her hand appeared a tiny steam gun.

"No!" she said coldly. "Get in and go."

He eyed her a second.

"You won't shoot," he decided with a grin. He leaped forward . . .

A lance of white leaped out, and the

planks at his feet curled and crackled in flame and splinters. Amazed, he lurched to a halt, drew back.

"Get in!" she screamed. "*Before it's too late!*"

The shouts of the men from the tunnel were close now. Brand hesitated one single furious second, then plunged into one of the cruisers and slammed the cowl shut. Out of the corner of his eye he saw her leap into another.

But he had no time to be surprised at this new maneuver. He shot the cruiser into the emptiness beyond the dock. Lances from steam guns were piercing the darkness around the cruiser now, while above the flare faded and died. Behind him, the cruiser piloted by Estelle bore at him. Its bow gun flamed fire, and a blast of energy seared past him.

"*Damn!*" he swore in shock and surprised anger. *She was shooting at him!*"

With wild rage in his heart, he slammed the throttle down to the floor, and whipped the tiny cruiser into the black depths beyond the great battleship and in an instant he was lost in pitch blackness that was broken only by the faint flash of steam guns far behind on the ledge. He had gotten away, clean!

Burning anger seethed through him as he set the automatic black-light pilot in operation. That would prevent him from crashing against a crater wall, even though it was hundreds of miles to the other side. As the cruiser rushed on in the blackness, his thoughts calmed. With curi-

ous certainty, he realized that the blast from Estelle's bow guns had been deliberately close, yet far enough harmlessly to miss him. He realized that if Estelle had wished, she could have blasted him completely. She had missed intentionally.

And now, she was back there, probably docking again, to report failure in stopping him. Then she'd carry out the cold words she had spoken to him, return to Jeffry Killian to carry her vengeance to the chilling conclusion that Martin Brand knew suddenly she would. In spite of the memory of her loveliness, the recollection of the soft warmth and allure of her body, Brand shuddered.

"My God," he whispered. "What's happened to her?"

Brand turned off the motors of the cruiser and drifted silently along in the utter blackness of the Black Hole. Vainly his eyes tried to pierce the gloom, tried to see either a light indicating an exit to the surface, or a distant rock wall that might glow with phosphorescence and allow him to follow it to an opening back into Luna's interior.

Right now he was somewhere in Luna's crust, which ranged from five hundred to a mere two hundred miles in thickness. A sense of dizziness swept over him momentarily as he discovered that he couldn't determine which was up and which was down. In fact, he floated aimlessly in emptiness so complete that he had absolutely no sense of direction, if such a thing as direction had ever existed.

Suddenly he knew the reason for the legends and terror attached to being lost in the famed Black Hole—for he realized now that he *was* lost. Out in empty space, no matter how vast it seemed, there were always stars—millions of them, all recognizable in their formations, so that direction was merely a matter of a star map. Here, in utter blackness, space lost its immensity, and became a black shell that pressed hard against one. Beyond it was nothing—not even in imagination.

In spite of himself, an eerie sensation of terror crept over Brand. His hands remained calm, and his thoughts crept deliberately over his problem, but the hair on his neck rose in unexplained terror. The Black Hole was demonstrating its most terrible feature—its ability to immerse those lost within its immensities in terrifying mind-chilling panic.

"Steady, Martin," he told himself. "The wall of this thing is right behind you, back where the docks are."

Even as his voice sounded muffled in the cockpit of the tiny cruiser, Brand knew that "behind" was just another word. He didn't know which direction *had been* behind. Now it was just the other way from ahead.

He shot back the cowl of the cruiser, and breathed the heady atmosphere of Luna's interior. It seemed curiously rare here, and he grinned suddenly.

"That's it!" he exclaimed.

For a moment he drove the ship at high speed, having once more closed the cowl, then he shut off the motor, opened the cowl, and breathed deep-

ly. The air was rarer than before!

"Up!" he said exultantly. "Who's lost!"

Carefully he noted the calibrations on the meters on the control board, then swung the ship around in a one hundred-eighty degree arc. Again he opened up the motor and blasted through the blackness.

A half-hour later the motor-jets ceased firing.

The enormity of the catastrophe that had happened dawned on him with a rush. The cruiser still hurtled along at high speed, but it would gradually slow down, then it would drift toward the nearest crater wall and land there. From then on it would be a matter of making his way on foot.

On foot! In the Black Hole!

He looked hopefully at the fuel indicator, pounded it with his fist, but the needle remained stationary—at the empty mark.

"I hope they're as careless with those battleships!" he growled angrily.

He settled back in the seat, helpless to do anything but scowl at the dimly illuminated instrument panel. He took mental stock of his situation. He had no weapons on his person, but he did have a gun mounted in the bow, which was too heavy to detach and carry.

He fumbled about the interior of the cruiser, but it was tiny, and obviously never intended for fighting purposes. There were no other weapons. Furthermore, there was no food, nor water.

He had no flashlight, and to walk *anywhere* in this giant crater without a light would be a suicidal undertaking.

For several hours he drifted aimlessly, fretting at the inaction. His speed, according to the indicator, had dropped to a mere eight miles per hour. He might drift endlessly at that rate, depending on his direction in relation to the walls of the Black Hole.

As he debated on this possibility, he was hurled forward in his seat as the cruiser crashed into solid rock. Even at this slow speed, the shock was abrupt, although not enough to injure him. After the noise of the crash was gone, the silence enveloped him. The lights on the cruiser had gone out. The only indication of life was his own breathing, which boomed loudly in his own ears.

Brand leaned forward in the darkness, fumbled at the instrument panel. He swore vehemently several times, but finally he came up with a dashlight, which he'd wrested whole from the panel. With it came a handful of wire torn from its bowels, and several batteries.

It took fully fifteen minutes to connect them up, and the result was a dim glow that spread radiance only a few feet in each direction. It was enough of a glow for him to see that he had crashed on a barren rock surface. Judging from the weight of his body, which was about twenty-five moon pounds, he was at the moment perched precariously on the steep perpendicular wall of the Black Hole. In relation to the moon itself, he was

actually standing at right angles to the perpendicular. Gravity was a peculiar thing on this hollow world!

Then he climbed out of the cruiser and walked to its bow. He considered it a moment then began walking slowly forward in the direction the bow indicated he had been traveling when the cruiser had struck. That way would be "down" toward the interior of the moon. To walk was a difficult task as due to the light gravity, he often found himself twisting helplessly in the air.

Behind him, in the darkness, Brand heard a faint rustling, a swish of moving air, and he turned awkwardly. There was a rushing sound, growing in the dark like the nearing approach of some huge body, and the skin crawled on his scalp. The dim light he carried only served to accentuate the darkness beyond its range, and he could see nothing.

In desperation he tore the wires loose from their connections, and the light went out. As he did so, the cause of the rushing wind became obvious. Swooping down, almost upon him, was the dreaded, faintly-glowing body of a lu-bat!

Before he could dodge its attack, a curiously light but strong body crashed into him, and cruel talons dug into his flesh. A pair of powerful tentacles wrapped themselves around him, and with a dizzying rush he felt himself carried aloft at terrific speed.

For a moment, the pain of the talons clutching him and the shock of the attack had dazed him, but when he recovered his senses, he re-

alized that he was being carried to some unknown destination at express-train pace. He had no doubt as to what this destination was—the nest of the lu-bat! The purpose—food for young lu-bats!

He became aware that he still clutched the wires from his make-shift light in his hand, but the light itself and the batteries were gone. He was about to drop the wire also, when a thought struck him. He had a grim look of determination as he squirmed around and peered up at the scrawny neck of the lu-bat which was bobbing up and down as it flew through the increasingly heavy lunar-ian atmosphere.

"You'll never get me to that nest!" he vowed softly. "Because where I go, corpse or not, you'll go too!"

With a painful effort, he slung the loose end of the wire around the lu-bat's neck, and tied a secure, but loosely looped, knot in it. Then he removed the empty steam-gun holster from his belt, inserted it in the coil of the wire, and twisted it slowly until it began to tighten around the neck of the lu-bat like a tourniquet.

Then, hands on the holster, he waited. If he killed the creature now it would mean dashing himself to death when they crashed to the surface. If he waited, he could apply the pressure, and it would be a battle to the death. If he won . . .

His jaw tightened.

"The luck of 'Sulicide' Martin Brand will have to be better than it ever has before," he whispered softly to himself.

The giddy swaying of the lu-bat's motion was beginning to make Brand very sick, and the pain of the creature's talons was becoming intense. He could feel blood running down one side, as the cruel claws pierced his skin. He used one hand to tear at the tentacles holding him, and they tightened, but the talons loosened, releasing him altogether as the lu-bat became aware of his efforts and concentrated on wrapping him more tightly in the tentacles.

Brand gasped for breath and desisted his efforts. If this was any indication, the lu-bat was going to have all the better of the strangling contest which would begin the moment he tightened that tourniquet.

Below his feet, Brand saw a faint glowing spot, and he peered intently. The rush of wind in his eyes prevented accurate observation, but suddenly he identified it.

"A city!" he exclaimed.

The tentacles around his body tightened convulsively. His explosive utterance had alarmed the lu-bat. Blackness washed over his vision in a wave that was not the blackness of the Black Hole.

When he could see again, the dim spot of light was gone. It was only when he relocated it off to the side a few minutes later that he realized the lu-bat had changed its course. All at once Brand noticed a difference in the darkness. There was a sharp line where pitch black ended, and a slightly lesser degree of black began.

The edge of the Black Hole!

He was *out* of the "pit of lost

men!" He was being carried by the bat through the atmosphere of inner Luna itself!

Then he noticed that the black rim was sliding upward a bit, and coming nearer. The lu-bat wasn't emerging from the pit, but merely heading toward what was possibly its lair somewhere along the inner edge of that rim. As they drew nearer, Brand tightened his grip on the steam-gun holster, and readied himself for a quick series of twists that would tighten the innocuous, but deadly strand of wire around the beast's throat.

The lu-bat slackened speed and hovered an instant over a ledge. Brand saw the darker opening of a small cave that slid smoothly downward. This was undoubtedly the bat's lair, and perhaps an impossible place out of which to climb. In quick determination, Brand twisted frantically on the tourniquet. It was now or never!

The wire loop sank out of sight into the leathery neck of the lu-bat, and a fearsome *squawk* became a screaming gurgle. Instantly, Brand found himself the center of a cyclone of pain and swirling action.

The tentacles tightened convulsively around him, and he felt a rib crack with agonizing torture. His head seemed to be swelling and about to burst. The air rushed out of his lungs as though he were being smashed beneath a steam roller. The talons of the lu-bat sank into his shoulder and cut deeply.

Almost in a faint, Brand continued

to twist, then stopped, conscious despite the whirlwind of tossing and floundering around, that too much twisting might snap the wire and allow the pressure to be released.

He hung on, managed to slip one end of the holster beneath the loop of the knot in the wire itself. This, he did so it wouldn't spin around and loosen the tourniquet when unconsciousness would cause him to lose his grip.

He felt the huge beast smash into the ground . . . one leg went numb with the blow. One hand was torn from his grip on the holster, and ground against a rocky surface that shredded his skin.

Tremendous shocks buffeted him as the lu-bat flopped around. Then he felt himself hurled fifty feet through the air, and despite the low gravity, he landed with a stunning, bone-breaking crash at the base of the wall that marked the inner edge of the ledge. He felt his body slipping slowly over the edge of the lu-bat's nest, and glimpsed below him the yawning mouths and the staring eyes of a dozen small lu-bats, who were lunging about in excitement and anticipation of the feast that awaited them.

Frantically, with his last conscious effort, Brand clawed his fingers into the creviced rock and tried to drag his body back from its precarious position. The tremendous thrashing of the dying parent lu-bat raised a din in his ears that kept him from the brink of unconsciousness for the moment, but then he found himself going limp, and his fingers released

their grip. He slipped down . . .

A tremendous blow from the lubat's wing smashed into him, and the lu-bat flopped down past him into its lair. Brand was almost unaware of the tremendous commotion that resulted below him as all went black and sound was blotted out by terrible silence.

Martin Brand found himself lying in a bed and suddenly became aware of his surroundings in a very unsatisfactory manner—to him. He discovered that it was distinctly no pleasure to awake and find every limb aching and his head feeling as though a dozen imps were pounding on his skull with red hot hammers.

But there was one thing that was certainly not painful. Instead, it was strangely soft, cool and caressing. It ran soothingly across his forehead in a gentle way that reminded him of a woman's fingers . . . woman's fingers?

Looking down into his eyes were the cool blue ones of the mystery girl, the girl who had killed a man to save his life—for no reason at all.

He closed his eyes.

"No," he whispered to himself. "I'm lying in a hole with baby lubats picking my bones clean. I can't be in a bed, with *her* nursing me. It just isn't logical."

"But it's true," came her calm voice, soft and melodious. "You *are* in bed. I *am* stroking your forehead, and the lu-bats *aren't* picking your bones . . . because I got to you before you fell to them."

He opened his eyes again.

"The luck of Suici . . ." he shut his lips tightly, suddenly. Then he went on, covering up his near slip. "The luck of Satan himself must be with me."

"Yes, Martin Brand," she said, "your luck is still holding out. No need to look startled, or alarmed. I know who you are, and why you are here."

Brand lifted himself on one elbow and groaned. "Damn!" he said feelingly. "I'm all busted up."

He sank back again, and continued what he had been about to say:

"You know an awful lot, too much, in fact. Just who are you, anyway?"

"My name," she said, "is Kathleen Dennis. My number is 28, and my sector is 24A, Luna. You have two broken ribs. We are in my ship somewhere near the Liebnitz mountains and a small crater near the Black Hole. And you are going to stay right where you are until you are able to get back to work."

He stared at her.

"That's just dandy! And who says so?"

"Special Services."

"Do you mean to tell me," he asked wonderingly, "that you, a woman, are in the Special Service working on the same problem I am?"

She nodded.

"Is that so unusual? Don't you think I can handle the job?"

"So far," he said wryly. "I'm in no position to deny that. And I'm rather relieved to know you killed Ormandy because he had me on the spot. I had you ticketed for a lot different set-up . . ." he stopped, and

his eyes narrowed slightly ". . . maybe it is a different set up!"

"You mean you don't believe my story?"

He looked at her steadily.

"Personally, I'd like to, but actually, I'd be a fool to. You may be one of the gang. Just the same, your orders don't go with me. I'm getting up right now, and doing a little sending over your radio."

Brand tossed back the covers, grimacing with the pains his motions caused, and tired to get his feet (which he discovered were bare) out onto the floor. He was clad in brilliant blue pajamas, certainly not at all intended for the male sex.

"You've certainly taken some liberties!" he said with some confusion, "or is the orderly out on an errand?"

"There is no orderly," she said, "and you aren't getting up, nor are you sending anything over any radio." She put her hands gently on his shoulders and pressed him back on the pillows.

"Oh, yes, I am!" he said angrily. "It's a matter of vital importance. And if you don't let me get up, I'll fix you, but good!"

She crossed the tiny cabin, took his clothes from a locker, and walked to the door.

"You can have these," she said, "after you feel better. As for your 'vital' message, I've already taken care of that. I radioed the home base of the presence of armed enemy ships in the Black Hole. He is sending in a patrol cruiser in a few hours."

"A patrol cruiser!" gasped Brand, sitting up in spite of the pain. "Good God, girl, that crater is full of *battleships*! The minute a cruiser shows up, it'll be blasted wide open. It'll never come back out of the Black Hole!"

She looked at him curiously.

"Do you really believe that?" she asked. "I told headquarters base you were babbling about battleships, but he was convinced you were delirious. Such ships could not possibly have gotten into Luna. They'd have to pass the fleet, and they could not have come down the entrance crater on Dark Side. There is no other crater through which they could enter."

"What about the one you just told me about?" he asked. "If you came out near the Liebnitz range from a crater that opens near the Black Hole, the answer is obvious."

She smiled sweetly.

"Too small," she said. "It's known only to the Special Service, and it's through that the patrol ship will go—with barely enough room. That's the main reason a patrol is being sent. The other is simply to check on your belief, however wrong, that there are armed forces in the Black Hole."

She moved into the doorway.

"Where are you going with my clothes?" he demanded, scrambling painfully half out of bed.

"Somewhere where you won't be tempted to put them on and leave this ship," she said. "And too, I have work to do. I have to guide the patrol to the crater entrance. They don't know where it is."

She shut the door, and as he stared, he heard the lock turn.

"Damn!" he said loudly.

With a groan, he heaved himself erect, crossed to the door and rattled the knob.

"You crazy little fool!" he shouted. "That patrol ship will never come out! Let me out of here! I'll radio Commander Wilson myself!"

There was no answer, and as he stood there, the ship lurched, and took off slowly. He reeled back to the bunk, sat down, and hung on until the ship leveled off. Then he got up again, crossed to the lockers and opened each one in turn. The first was bare; the other held a regulation space suit. He grunted, then with great effort, he climbed into it. When he had completed his job of make-shift clothing, he removed the small crowbar from the belt of the space suit. He crossed to the door and inserted it between door and jamb. Then, sweating with the pain the effort caused, he pressed until the lock sprang open and the door swung inward.

He gripped the steam gun from the holster in the space suit and walked unsteadily down the tiny corridor toward the control room. Here he found the girl seated at the controls. She was looking out of the observation window. There was another ship out there, a patrol cruiser. Brand recognized its sleek lines.

He stood behind the girl, leveled his gun.

"Okay, Kathleen," he said, his voice muffled in the space suit, "you

can open up the radio key and send a little message to that patrol."

She whirled around, faced him. She took one amazed glance at the space suit, then she smiled.

"I forgot the suit," she confessed.

"I'd have come in the pajamas," he said grimly, "or without, if necessary. That patrol has got to stop!"

Her eyes narrowed.

"Why?"

"Because it's suicide!" he said angrily. He opened the face plate on the suit.

"Open that key," he demanded.

"I'm in no mood to fool around."

She turned and pressed the key. Then she spoke into the transmitter. "Twenty-eight calling Space Patrol N-twenty-seven."

The reply came instantly.

"Space Patrol N-twenty-seven. Ready for message."

Brand leaned over, grasped the microphone in his free hand.

"Cancel that order to investigate," he said. "It's suicide. There are at least three heavy battle cruisers anchored inside, and they'll blast you to atoms in two seconds."

"What . . ." came a startled gasp from the patrol ship. "Battle cruisers . . . hey, wait a minute. I'll have to call Captain Craig." There was a moment's pause, then the voice of the operator came in again.

"Who are you?" asked the puzzled voice. "Is this the ship alongside?"

"Yes," said the girl. "I'm right here. At the moment I have a steam gun in my back. My patient has

refused to believe I have orders from headquarters."

"I believe 'em," snapped Brand. "That's what's bothering me. I know what you fellows are going into, and I've got to stop it."

A new voice cut in.

"Captain Craig calling," the voice said. "What's the trouble, twenty-eight?"

"Captain," said Brand urgently. "This is Martin Brand. I've discovered at least three of Mars' biggest battleships anchored in the Black Hole. If you go in there, you'll be blasted out of existence . . ."

"What did you say your name was?" asked Captain Craig's voice with a peculiar note to it.

"Martin Brand," snapped Brand. "I am a Special Service operative, acting under Commander Wilson."

"Commander Wilson, eh? Whoever you are," said the radio, "land at once and prepare for boarding . . ." The radio went dead.

Brand stared down at Kathleen in surprise. Her hand was on the key.

"What'd you do that for?" he asked. "And what does he mean 'whoever I am'?"

Her face was white, and there was something in her eyes akin to terror.

"Martin," she said tensely. "Commander Wilson died four days ago of a heart attack! So, when Captain Craig questioned your identity, he had good reason. Another thing: Didn't you know that a public funeral was held for you when you became Robert Wales in actuality a week ago? Commander Wilson deemed it the wisest course, because he knew

things were about to break. So when you said Martin Brand . . ."

Brand's senses whirled dizzily around him.

"You mean . . .?" he gasped.

"Yes, I lied to you when I said I radioed about the battleships. I did radio, but could only report suspicious activity in this locality. If this Special Service thing were to become known to the Senate . . ."

"Then Craig intends to arrest me?" questioned Brand harshly.

"Yes. And when he does, he'll arrest you as Robert Wales. You'll be exiled to Venus, perhaps, but that's better than being shot as a spy . . ."

Kathleen's voice was trembling strangely.

"I only wanted to save you from the terrible situation you are in . . ."

A moment Brand stared at her curiously. Then he smiled.

"I'm not in a jam," he said. "Commander Wilson foresaw that something might happen to him, so he placed a complete record on file, to be opened in an emergency concerning Robert Wales, which will completely exonerate me and reveal me as a Special Service agent. It will even prove that my original conviction, under the name of Robert Wales, was a put-up job to conceal my true mission, and give me access to the plots and counterplots of the fifth-columnists."

Kathleen rose to her feet and faced him, her face even whiter than before. "No, Martin," she said, "you are wrong. There are no such papers. A week ago the Bureau of Records of

the Special Service was completely wrecked by an explosion, and every document was burned in the resulting fire. I am the only other living being who knows you are Martin Brand, and I couldn't prove it. I can't even prove you are Robert Wales . . ."

For a long moment Brand stared at her in stunned surprise. Then, the tiny cruiser rocked as a shell exploded across her bow.

"We've got to land!" Kathleen cried. "They're shooting a warning over our bow!"

Abruptly Brand pushed her aside, slid into the control seat, ignoring the agony in his chest.

"Where's that crater opening?" he asked savagely. "Straight ahead?"

"Yes," she said, "*No! We're over it now!*" Her eyes were fixed on the observation window. "But Martin, please don't! They'll shoot us down . . ."

Below them Martin Brand saw the small, dark opening of the crater. With a motion that hurled the girl into a corner in a heap, and pressed him savagely back into his seat with pain grinding in his chest, he sent the cruiser hurtling down into the black depths. The brilliance of sunlight was replaced by pitch darkness. It was lighted momentarily by the brilliant flash of a magnesium-atomic exploding against the wall beyond him as the patrol ship took a desperate shot at him in a crippling attempt. The light showed Brand what he needed, and for the next six seconds he drove the cruiser down a narrow, slanting shaft with death at each elbow. Then and only then did

he turn on the lights.

A scream came from behind him. "*Martin! We're going to crash! . . . This tunnel turns at right angles two miles down!*"

Looming up a mile ahead was the wall of rock that seemed to be the end of the tunnel. Rockets roared and flame filled the crater shaft as Martin gave the decelerators everything the ship had. Blackness reeled in on him, but he hung on grimly, ignoring the pain in his chest that threatened to engulf him in unconsciousness.

Even through the walls of the ship the scream of the bow rockets was audible . . . and it was the last thing Brand heard before he sighed helplessly and eased down into a feathery oblivion—that and his own tortured voice whispering in agony: "Damn those broken ribs . . ."

It was a dream. It couldn't be anything else . . . waking in a bed, feeling a cool hand on his forehead, opening his eyes to stare up into the deep blue ones of the girl with the red hair—that had all happened before.

"How do you feel now?" Kathleen asked.

He looked up at her, and puckered his brows.

"I feel pretty good," he admitted. "But all this is a little cockeyed. It's happened before, and that isn't logical. This time I'm only dreaming. I'll wake up, and find myself lying in the bottom of a crater . . ."

He sat up, discovered that his ribs were still sore, but was conscious that

all the agonizing pain was gone.

"Hey! I am awake! And this isn't a ship. It's . . ."

"It's a hospital in Luna City," said Kathleen. "I flew you here after ducking the patrol in the crater shaft. They went on to the Black Hole to investigate. I found some papers in your clothes saying you were Edgar Barnes, prospector, and I told them I'd picked you up after you had been attacked by lu-bats."

"How long ago was that?" asked Brand urgently.

"Oh, I brought you here over a week ago. You've been in a pretty bad way."

"I don't mean that!" exploded Brand impatiently. "How long ago since the patrol ship went into the Black Hole?"

"They went in immediately after we eluded them. But no one in Luna knows it."

"Any report since?"

"I don't know. I had to hide my ship in a crater. Besides, the radio got smashed when we hit the wall . . ."

"Hit the wall!"

"Yes, but not hard. You had the ship nearly stopped when we reached the turn in the crater shaft."

"You took over from there, hid from the patrol, and took me here, concealing my identity?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what you've done? You've aided a criminal to escape. You've placed yourself in a situation as impossible to explain as my own. I'm a nobody now. I'm dead and buried. Even my mock-personality

is non-existent. I am an assumed name which can't hold up a minute under inspection, with the strange angle that when the fraud is discovered, there's no real name to tack onto me. I'm the living example of a nonentity!"

"Yes," she said. "I know what I've done."

"Why are you doing it?" he asked bluntly.

She looked at him a long moment, then she spoke slowly.

"First, because it's part of my work. I have a job to do, which is just as necessary for me to carry through, as yours is for you. Now, with the situation the way it is, the whole thing is left up to me. The second and I guess, the best explanation is because I love you."

Brand sat bolt-upright in bed.

"What!"

Her eyes met his steadily.

"For ten years I've admired you—no, longer! I think I loved you, in a worshiping, little-girl way even before your intended marriage. I was happy when I thought you had found your happiness, and I cried when she jilted you. I've cried many times since then—every time I heard another story of 'Suicide' Martin Brand and his reckless exploits on the space lanes. Everybody called you a lucky fool, a fighting daredevil who always seemed to bear a charmed life, who always won what he fought for. But I knew the real drive behind you. I knew the unhappiness that filled you, the hurt you were trying to hide, the ache you were trying to kill, and

the memories you were trying to forget.

"I joined the Service simply because I loved you, and I wanted to find you, and follow you, and meet you . . . and try to take the place of that, that . . ."

She paused and her eyes fell finally. But she went on:

"Once I almost met you. It was in a bar. You were too drunk to notice anybody, and I was sitting nearby. I heard you say something that proved all I knew about what really goes on inside you. You said, to no one in particular, because you were alone: 'I wanted a woman, a woman who could ride the stars with me in a little cottage on the sea shore . . .' When you said that, Martin, I discovered I wanted to be that woman . . ."

Her voice ceased, and her eyes lifted again, looked at his.

For a long moment there was silence while he looked at her, while he fought for something to say. Then it was she who spoke.

"I know I'm making a fool out of myself, but what I've said had to be said now, because I think it will be the last chance I will ever have to say it. I'm going now, and I won't see you again. You had better go too. Your work is ended. You must leave here, because even if no one on Earth will believe who you are, there are people here who know, and they will see that you are removed."

"You crazy little fool," said Brand chokingly. "You crazy little fool. Somebody ought to spank you." He swung his legs out of the bed and

stood up. "Call an orderly. I want my clothes. I'm getting out of here right now, and I'm damned if I'm going to run away. Commander Wilson is still my boss, and he gave me a job to do. I'm going to do it, if I can!"

She stood staring at him.

"Please," she pleaded. "You must go away. You can't do anything. Even if you found out the truth, you couldn't make any Earth official believe it . . ."

"Then I'll do it myself!" said Brand. "I *know* the truth!" That Black Hole is filled with Martian battleships, and they'll be coming out soon to blast at Earth. Then it'll be too late. And why you, who are supposed to be on the same mission I am, keep insisting on letting that happen, I can't understand. If you say you know me so well, and are in love with me, which is the wildest thing I ever heard of, then why don't you help me, instead of hindering me?"

Her face burned red. Then she spoke, and her voice was level.

"I'll send an orderly. Put your clothes on and meet me in the lobby. We're going to the Black Hole . . . *together!* And if you can show me those battleships . . ."

She whirled and almost ran from the room while Brand stared after her in amazement and bewilderment.

In a few minutes the orderly came, and Brand asked for his clothes.

"I'm leaving," he said. "Please have my bill made out . . ."

"It's been paid," said the orderly.

Brand flushed.

"Then get my clothes," he barked. "I'm in a hurry."

Ten minutes later he walked down the hallway, rather unsteadily, but with growing strength as he regained a surety of step. He went down in the elevator, walked into the lobby. He glanced around, but saw no one.

Suddenly he noticed two men advancing toward him. One was dressed in the uniform of the Lunar Police. The other was the taxi-driver Brand had marooned in the crater-bottom near the Black Hole.

"You're under arrest," said the Lunarian officer.

Brand's eyes narrowed and he tensed himself. He eyed the taxi-driver who now was dressed in civilian clothes and stood looking at him with a strange calmness in his manner, a peculiar glint in his eyes.

"What for?" asked Brand.

"For theft, for attack with intent to do great bodily harm, for kidnapping, and if that isn't enough . . . for murder," said the officer. "Put out your hands."

There was a pair of handcuffs in one hand, and a steam gun in his other. It was leveled straight at Brand's heart.

As Brand put out his hands reluctantly, there came a slight hissing. The light globe in the ceiling shattered, and the room was plunged into darkness. Brand hurled himself instantly to one side. A brilliant lance of white pierced the spot where his body had been. Brand stumbled over a chair, picked it up and hurled it savagely at the spot where the officer

had been standing. There was a thud, a muffled curse, and the sound of a falling body, but Brand wasn't waiting to hear more. He plunged toward the door, which was dimly lighted from the street lights outside.

Without bothering to open it, he shielded his head in his arms and hurled his body straight through the thin plastic-glass. It shattered with a crash, and he fell to the sidewalk outside. Parked at the curb was a taxi, which Brand hurled himself into. With one savage blow he knocked the driver unconscious, then dumped him over the side.

From somewhere down the street a white flash came. The glass of the windshield shattered and frosted weirdly under the effect of the intensely hot steam bolt from a steam-gun. But Brand had the taxi under way now, and it hummed into the air, flashed around the corner of a building, and roared upward into the darkness of inner Luna.

Behind him a fast ship, not a cab, was climbing in pursuit. Brand realized it was a police flier, obviously the vehicle of the officer who had come in to arrest him, with a fellow officer in it. Apparently the encounter with Brand on his feet, when they had expected to arrest him in his bed, had caught them a bit unaware.

The ship behind was by far faster than the cab, but Brand had gotten a good start. Now, against the pitch black of the inner world's eternal midnight sky, Brand knew it would be a difficult job for them to spot

him. He made sure every light was out, then sent the cab hurtling on a tangent. Three times he changed directions, then zoomed down close to the rocky surface and slowed so that his motor roar became a dull humming. He searched the black vault above him with keen eyes.

The pursuing ship was nowhere in sight.

"Those Lunar police are no fools," he said. "They've probably doused their lights too, and are waiting for me to come up again."

Brand studied the faint lighted spots that indicated Lunar cities far above on the other side of the hollow ball and tried to determine his whereabouts. Finally he nodded grimly, then sent the taxi humming toward the north of Lunar City. If he hadn't forgotten, it was near there he would find a familiar crater . . .

A half-hour later he was sure his directions were right. He rose higher in the air, and increased his speed. Ahead loomed the black spot that was the crater. Abruptly a brilliant beam of light bathed the ship in its rays. Behind him the police ship bore down on him.

"Right!" gasped Brand. "He *wasn't* so dumb. That guy's a real policeman!"

There was admiration in his voice, even as he shot the taxi down at the limit of its speed, straight for the edge of the crater. He looped over it fast, dropped down like a plummet. Then he leveled off and landed on the now familiar ledge. He whirled the wheel of the cab, faced it on an angle toward the farther edge of the

crater, stepped out, and shot the motor button all the way down. He dropped to the ledge in a heap as the taxi roared upward and away. It raced out of the crater like a meteor, its exhausts visible now with the tremendous speed.

He dropped behind a boulder and waited. The police ship roared over the edge of the crater, spun violently to avoid collision, then looped to follow the hurtling, driverless taxi. Both ships bore away on a straight line at tremendous speed, and Brand chuckled.

"He thought I intended to drive him against the wall with that maneuver. Now he'll follow until he gets me!"

From behind Brand there came a shout, and he turned to see armed men pouring from the tunnel at the base of the ledge. They had seen him land, and were after him!

Brand rose to his feet, ran back into the shadows along the crater wall and raced along. Around him bolts from steam-guns were hitting. He ducked low, unable to fire back. He had no steam-gun this time. It hadn't been with his clothes. A sudden memory staggered him in his stride and he stopped in his tracks, retraced his steps several yards, anxiously scanned the base of the crater wall where it met the floor of the ledge. His pursuers, amazed at this inexplicable maneuver, slowed down; several dropped behind boulders.

Then Brand saw it . . . the atomic rifle he had taken from the Martian guard he'd killed the first time he landed on this ledge!

He seized it, dropped flat on his stomach, and sighted at the advancing men. Brilliant explosions rocked the ledge. Several men went down like stricken sheep. Brand fired quickly, methodically, and in a moment the ledge before him seemed deserted. All of his attackers who had not been killed, had hidden themselves as effectively as possible.

Brand laid down a thundering barrage of shots that blanked out the ledge in waves of smoke and dust, then he leaped to his feet and ran back the way he had originally been heading. In the black shadows he almost ran into the aero-taxi where he had hidden it. With a thrill of thankfulness he climbed into it, slid into the driver's seat, and sent the craft humming into the darkness of the crater, hidden from view of the men on the ledge by the smoke that still hung thickly around the scene of the exploded atomic shells.

A moment later he was over the edge and speeding forward toward the Black Hole.

"Now to find out about that patrol ship," he said grimly.

It was obvious that the system of caves through which he had traveled originally to reach the Black Hole was located between the crater he had just left, and the Black Hole itself. Therefore, the Martians would be anchored directly below him and perhaps only four or five miles down.

That hunch proved to be correct. As Brand allowed his aero-cab to drift slowly down in the inky blackness, the bulk of a tremendous vessel

loomed up suddenly, so close that he grazed the giant hull.

Brand stopped the cab short, hung motionless under the belly of the great, deadly fish of space. He could see its bulk dimly, stretching for a thousand yards in each direction. Somewhere off to his left would be the wooden docks where the small cruisers were located. If properly fueled, one of those ships would be much better than the unarmed aero-cab. Against the giant battleships, they would be as impotent as a mosquito, of course, but Brand had no intention of attempting anything so futile.

He moved the aero-cab slowly along under the belly of the monster ship, noting the huge bomb racks with their gaping openings. Those bombs were hydrogen atomic bombs, just as were the bullets in his atomic rifle. They must never be loosed on Earth!

He sent the aero-cab toward the wooden docks, and reached them in pitch darkness. With some unavoidable bumping around, he managed to make the cab fast and climbed onto the dock. He couldn't see whether there were any cruisers tied up there or not.

"Can't risk a light," he muttered.

He dropped to his hands and knees and crawled along the docks, so as not to stumble off into space. At each mooring post, he felt for a cable that would indicate a cruiser moored there.

Finally he found one. The gang-plank was down, and in a moment he had opened the lock and stepped inside. This ship was considerably

larger than the one he had escaped in before. It was at least a ten-man cruiser, and when he had closed the lock, he fumbled for the light switch and snapped it on.

Lying on the floor at his feet was the body of a Martian guard, his face seared away by a steam-gun blast and his body lying in a pool of blood!

"My God!" exclaimed Brand in stunned surprise, unable to fathom the meaning of this discovery.

Swiftly Brand snapped off the lights and stood still. Was there anybody else on this ship? He listened intently, but heard no sound. Softly he made his way forward. This cruiser would have a radio—and it was the radio he wanted to find. He reached the control room door and opened it softly. It was dark inside. He closed the door behind him, then groped forward.

Behind him a flashlight beam lanced out, caught him full in the back. His own shadow loomed giganticly against the control board ahead of him.

"Don't move," said a chill feminine voice. "Raise your arms into the air slowly!"

"Estelle!" he gasped, and whirled around.

"Martin!" For an instant the voice held unutterable shock, and she stood as though paralyzed. He couldn't see her face distinctly behind the brightness of the flashlight, but for an infinitesimal fraction of a second, he thought he saw annoyance mirrored in her tight lips.

Then abruptly she snapped out the flashlight and was in his arms, her lips pressed against his passionately, devouringly. She was sobbing.

"Oh Martin, Martin, I'm so glad you've come back. I'm in terrible trouble . . ."

Brand stood there, holding her in his arms tightly, a strange tumult in his breast.

"Estelle . . ." he choked. "I . . ."

The soft shaking of her shoulders and hungry pressure of her lips stirred him as nothing had ever stirred him before. But even in the confusion of it all, he remembered the near-miss of her guns as she had tried to shoot him down as he escaped into the Black Hole.

She must have sensed the doubt in his half-yielding lips, and reading his mind, she said, "You thought I was shooting at you?" she questioned tearfully. "*I wasn't*, Martin. I only wanted to make it look as though I was trying to get you. So that Jeffry Killian would trust me when I came back to him . . ."

His hands were on her shoulders, holding her at arm's length.

"Came back?" he asked. "You mean you wanted him to believe you were a friend, and your real intention was revenge?"

"Yes," she said slowly. "I hate him . . . more than I love you, if that's possible. I wanted to kill him; torture him slowly first, then kill him just as slowly. But I . . ." she paused.

Brand tried to see her features in the dark and failed.

"What did you say?" he whispered hoarsely.

"I wanted to kill him . . ." she began.

"No, no! You said something else . . ."

She lifted his hands from her shoulders, pressed close to him, and this time her lips kissed his cheeks, his lips, his nose, and finally buried themselves at his neck.

"I said 'as much as I love you'," she whispered. "And I *do*, Martin! Oh, I do! So very much . . ."

A fiery exaltation was suddenly surging through Brand's veins, and there was exultation in his voice.

"Thank God, Estelle, I've gotten you back at last! I've been going mad for ten years, with hunger for you, with memories . . ."

He kissed her lips tenderly, then he stood erect and gripped her arms tensely.

"You said you were in trouble! What kind of trouble? Who killed that Martian soldier in the corridor?"

"I did. I had to. He was guarding the cruiser—they've put a guard on everything now, since your escape."

"But why?" asked Brand. "What was so urgent on this ship that made you kill a man to get into it? Were you running away?"

"No. I wanted to send a radio message, and this is the only way I could do it without Jeff finding out where it came from, or who sent it."

"A message to whom?"

"To Commander Wilson. I knew he was your superior officer, and I had to know if you had escaped, and what you were doing. There's no

much that has been going on while you were gone! Martin, they're almost ready! The attack will come any day now!"

"Estelle," said Brand soberly. "I'm afraid there isn't much I can do about it. I'm in trouble too, and there's no way out. You see, Commander Wilson is dead. Officially, so is Martin Brand. In my identity as Robert Wales, I am a political criminal, and all record of my work as a Special Service agent is destroyed. I'm nobody, Estelle, except a nameless prospector wanted for murder by the Lunar police. I've got a job to do, and no one to help me do it. I've got to work entirely alone."

"What are you going to do?" she gasped.

"Just what you intended to do," said Brand. "I'm going to use that radio. But first, you must tell me something. Has there been any action down here? Has an Earth Patrol ship investigated? And if so, what happened to it?"

She shook her head.

"No. I'm sure of it. There has been no disturbance. But I do know that several more battleships have arrived, and many transports. They are strung in a long line straight down from this anchorage. They have sufficient force to invade Earth and subjugate it. The moon will be a simple matter. One battleship and one transport can take over the Lunar cities at will. The battleship will anchor at the center of the moon, command all the cities at long range, and blast those that refuse to surrender.

"The Martians will take over all the space ports, and fifth-columnists will aid in this work. Jeff said there were two hundred thousand fifth-columnists waiting for the battleship to emerge and destroy the main entry shaft. That will be the signal for the fifth-column attack."

"But that's suicidal!" said Brand. "How will they get the battleships out of the moon to attack Earth, with the main entry shaft gone? That's the only crater shaft large enough to admit such ships."

"They came in at Copernicus," said Estelle.

"*Copernicus!* Impossible! That crater has a solid bottom."

"No it hasn't. Martian engineers have been working on it for two years, constructing a huge shaft at an angle, so it isn't visible from above. Naturally no one ever visits that hellish hole."

"That's bad," said Brand. "Not even the Earth patrol will detect the Martians until they actually attack. Patrol ships don't cover the area between Earth and Luna."

"They'll win, Martin," said Estelle. "They'll win!"

There was a strange note in her voice and her trembling, strangely, had stopped.

"Maybe not!" said Brand grimly. "Give me that flashlight. I'm going to try to pick up that patrol ship. I'm sure it's still searching somewhere in the Black Hole. I'll have to get him, or nobody. The radio in this cruiser won't penetrate the Lunar crust, and can't reach the Earth."

Estelle gave him the flashlight, and he turned it on. He turned to the radio, and seated himself. He snapped on the switches, waited while the tubes warmed up, then pressed the sending switch.

"How do you know the wavelength?" asked Estelle curiously. Brand ignored her question for the moment. Instead he began calling tensely into the microphone.

"Robert Wales calling Patrol Ship N-twenty-seven. Calling Patrol Ship N-twenty-seven. Robert Wales calling Patrol Ship N-twenty-seven. Please come in, N-twenty-seven. Urgent. Please come in . . ."

"N-twenty-seven, answering Robert Wales," a voice suddenly crackled from the receiver. "Who the hell are you, and where are you?"

"Never mind who I am," said Brand. "Where are you?"

"Nice work, if you can get it," said the voice from the ether. "Hold on a minute, I'll call Captain Craig. He'll talk to you."

"There is an Earth Patrol ship in the Black Hole!" gasped Estelle.

"Sure . . ." Brand turned to her with a curious look. "What's so odd about that? It was sent in here to investigate and it never came out, so it's still here."

"But who sent it?" asked Estelle. "Certainly you wouldn't—it would be suicide, if they did find the battleships. Why, in one second they could be blasted to bits!"

"I know, and I didn't send it. Kathleen . . ."

"Captain Craig calling Robert

Wales," came a familiar voice from the radio. "What is your message?"

"Listen, Captain," said Brand urgently. "Radio Earth and tell them to send a task force to blockade Copernicus crater, and to investigate escape shaft at its bottom. Martian battleships are planning to emerge from it to attack Earth. This attack may be soon . . ."

"*I recognize your voice!*" said Captain Craig in sharp interruption. "So you're using your real name now, eh? Before it was Martin Brand. I checked on that again, you lousy traitor. Martin Brand is dead and buried, as official as hell. And you are an exile from Earth because of seditious acts. Come again, Wales. If you think an Earth task force will be lured into any Copernicus trap, you're mistaken. I'll call Earth all right, and the whole Patrol will be out after your hide."

"Captain," said Brand angrily, "you are a fool! Do you think it's logical that anybody could hope to gain from the destruction of any single Earth unit? I tell you, the danger is urgent. So long as you are in the Black Hole right now, you have the opportunity to check. If I show you a fleet of Martian battleships, will you believe me?"

"I've got eyes," said Captain Craig, "and from the sound of you, you're pretty close to us. What did you do to Miss Dennis?" There was a hard, cold, furious note in the patrol captain's voice.

"I left her in Luna City, where she took me to the hospital . . ."

"*You skunk!*" Captain Craig's

voice blasted from the receiver. "So you're Edgar Barnes too! I picked that up on the radio just a few hours ago. Killed an Earth citizen, kidnaped a taxi-driver, marooned him in a crater, and left him to die. Only he didn't die. He got out, and came to the police with enough to hang you . . ."

"Listen, you stupid ape," said Brand lowly. "I'll give myself up to you right now, if you want to come and get me, but when you pick me up, you'll also see those battleships. This is the only way I can carry out my work. Commander Wilson had me covered, but an explosion and fire destroyed any evidence I had to prove my identity. You can believe what you wish—Martin Brand, Edgar Barnes, or Robert Wales. Now if you'll point your ship wherever you are, in the direction of Luna city, and keep your eyes open, you'll see something very soon. As soon as you see it, I'll be coming at you from that source, to come aboard. After that, the rest is up to you."

There was a moment's hesitation from the receiver, then the voice of the captain came again.

"Whoever you are," he said slowly, "you sure sound sincere. Okay, buddy. Show me something, and I'll radio Earth so fast it'll singe the hair off every Martian on Luna!"

"Attaboy, Captain," said Martin Brand thankfully. "And one more thing, whatever you do, don't come too close. You can't beat what's lying here, and I would like to get out alive, if possible. I've got a friend here,

who . . ." Brand turned to smile triumphantly up at Estelle and broke off in mid-sentence. "She's gone!" he gasped.

"Who's gone?" asked Captain Craig's voice.

"Never mind," yelled Brand. "Watch in the direction of Luna City for fireworks, right down in the Black Hole. I've got to stop that girl . . . she's gone after Jeffry Killian . . ."

He snapped off the key and whirled toward the doorway. He plunged down the corridor recklessly, stumbled over the corpse of the Martian guard, and reached the gangplank.

As he stepped down to the dock, a brilliant searchlight beam winked on, and caught him full in its brilliance.

"Put up your hands!" came a shout. "Don't move another step!" Brand halted, baffled and angry.

Several Martian soldiers came out of the darkness and gripped his arms. They marched him along toward the caverns he had once escaped from. Their faces were grim.

"You didn't know when you were well off!" said one.

"Yes," said the other. "When Miss Carter gets hold of you, you'll be worse off than before. She's really doing a job running this show! An order from her is as good as one from the Commander, himself. I gotta hunch it'll be Mr. and Mrs. Jeffry Killian, governors of America, or something like that, when we smash the Earth in a couple of days. Smart, that dame . . ."

Brand's blood ran cold in his veins.

"What's that you say?" he faltered.

The Martian laughed hoarsely.

"Say, did you think you had a chance with that baby? She's ice. I don't know how she does it. Maybe it's because she was crazy once. She sure isn't now! Why the other day . . ."

"Look out!" screamed the other guard. "Lu-bats!"

The sweeping rush of wind that betokened the dive of one of the monsters of the Black Hole screamed down at them on the narrow ledge. One of the guards lifted his atomic rifle and began firing blindly.

"There's more than one!" screamed the guard again. "There're three, at least. We'll never get 'em in time . . . We're done . . ."

"Steam-guns!" shouted Brand. "Train your steam guns on the carcass, you fools! They can be blown up that way!"

"That's right," shouted one of his former captors, now shrinking back against the cavern wall, trying to pull his steam-gun out of its holster. "You pulled that trick before, didn't you . . .?"

Brand snatched the pistol from his grasp, trained it aloft, and pressed the trigger. The other guard was doing the same. The scream of the wind from the diving lu-bats was a shriek in their ears now, as they came down to the attack. They had undoubtedly been attracted by the searchlight, whose beams still bathed the docks and the pathway.

Suddenly the lu-bat Brand had concentrated on blew up with a terrific roar and a blinding flash of

flame that communicated itself to one of its two companions, and it too went off with a thunderous blast.

But the other lu-bat came on, seemingly oblivious of the holocaust of brilliance around it that now lit up the crater for ten miles around. Desperately Brand added the fire of his steam-gun to that of the other guard, and suddenly the combined beams took effect. A third flaming carcass came plunging down like a meteor, to flash past into the depths, only a few yards from them.

A hoarse scream of agony came from the guard with the steam-gun, and a large flaming fragment crashed down squarely on him. He screamed horribly once, then plunged off the ledge into the depths, a seared corpse.

Brand whirled, half-blinded by the light, and raced down the pathway toward the docks. An atomic rifle bullet exploded just behind him, sending a cloud of rock splinters into his back that struck with numbing force. Brand whirled, flicked up his steam-gun, caught the Martian soldier squarely in the chest. He went down, dead before he hit the rocky trail.

At the other end of the dock, a small cruiser darted out toward one of the battleships and Brand cursed.

"Who the hell . . ."

Then it dawned on him and he went white.

"Estelle!" he choked. "She's in that ship . . ."

He stumbled on down to the cruiser, and clambered into it. He shut the door, and made his way to the control room. Just as he reached

it, he saw Estelle's ship reach the side of the monster warcraft, saw it slip into an air-lock that opened to receive her.

Brand snapped open the radio key, waited impatiently while the tubes warmed up, but as he waited, he slammed home the motor levers and drew the ship away from the dock. He cursed when the ship stopped with a jolt. He'd forgotten to cast off the mooring cable.

His finger pressed down savagely, and as the cruiser leaped away, half the dock tumbled into the abyss of the crater behind him, and he grinned. Perhaps that hadn't been a half-bad mistake, at that. Now any pursuers couldn't reach the other cruisers to take off after him.

He sent the cruiser hurtling at right angles away from the huge battleship. Now that the lu-bat carcasses had disappeared into the depths, their brilliant flames extinguished, he lost himself in the blackness that had resulted.

Pressing the radio key, he called anxiously into it.

"Martin Brand calling Captain Craig, Patrol Ship, N Twent . . ."

"I hear you!" came the excited voice from the receiver. "And boy, I see you too! We're only a dozen miles away, straight out. Get off the air, Brand, or Wales, or whoever you are, I'm radioing Earth headquarters."

"Go ahead!" yelled Brand. "And start running. If those battleships spot you, it'll be curtains. Full speed away! Quick!"

He snapped off the radio and sent

the cruiser flashing along the crater wall. When he reached a spot where a sort of indentation offered concealment, he edged into it. Then he stopped the ship and waited. He listened intently to the radio, heard Craig's voice calling urgently into his transmitter.

"Patrol Ship N-twenty-seven, calling headquarters," he barked. "N-twenty-seven calling Earth . . . Come in, Earth headquarters . . ."

Suddenly a brilliant beam of light cut through the Black Hole as a searchlight on one of the battleships—the one Estelle had boarded—flashed on. A moment it flicked through the void like a giant sword, then suddenly it caught a tiny mote, lost it once, then held it fast.

"Damn!" said Brand, clenching his fists. "They've spotted the N-twenty-seven!"

A flash came from the battleship, and Brand could follow the course of it along the searchlight beam, saw it end at the tiny fleeing mote. There was a brilliant burst of flame, and the voice of Captain Craig in the receiver cut off abruptly.

And as its echoes died, Brand realized the truth—the message had not gotten through. Earth had not yet replied to its patrol ship's call!

Martin Brand sat in stunned silence for several long moments. Now, when he'd been just on the verge of the success of his mission, failure had blanked him out as completely as he had ever been. The luck of "Suicide" Martin Brand had come to an end.

The Earth was entirely unaware of the danger that threatened it. Estelle had tricked him. She had played up to him, fooled him with caresses. He thought almost subconsciously, with strange agony, of the red hair and the blue eyes of Kathleen Dennis, and a strange pang struck into his breast. A great anger was beginning to grow inside him, and it expressed itself in words now; words full of bitterness and hate that echoed through the silence of the control room.

"She wasn't sane! No sane person could have acted that superbly. Her mind might have regained its functions, but all the good in her, if there ever was any, had been killed. She was . . ."

He found no word to describe her.

Suddenly the radio receiver crackled and a voice came over it.

"Estelle Carter, calling Martin Brand," came the soft tones, but soft only in the sense that they were not loudly spoken.

In a sort of stupefied surprise, Brand clicked open the switch and answered. "What can I do for you now?" he said sarcastically.

"I, too, remembered the wavelength," her soft voice came to him mockingly. "And I am sitting in the control room, speaking over the private radio of the Commander of the Martian Invasion Fleet Enroute to Earth. In a few hours, I will take off to blast the Lunar entrance, and take control of the inner world. The rest of the fleet will proceed, under my orders, through Copernicus to Earth, to destroy the defenses. Earth

will have to surrender in a matter of hours.

"Then, because it was I who did it, I will be able to dictate my own terms. I shall rule the Earth as the representative of the Martian government. I shall be truly an empress of the world, as there never has been before."

"You're mad!" said Brand.

"No," she said in the same level tones. "Mad once, but not now. Today I am the sanest person alive. I am, I realize it now, the ultimate example of sanity. All people have some insanity in their make-up. I have none. Everything but absolute logic has been erased from my brain. I am not hindered by emotion, although I understand fully what it is, and can simulate it if necessary. You should know that.

"If you had been as I am, you would not have been tricked by your emotions. You would have seen through my empty kisses, because, in the light of cold reason, they had no foundation. But you let your body rule your reason. You responded, and forgot to think . . ."

"You're possessed by the devil!" croaked Brand.

"I am a sane, logical, steady-minded human being. Perhaps, the only one who has ever lived."

"What . . . how did you do what you have done?" he asked.

"Remember the Martian you found dead in the ship in which you now sit?"

"Yes."

"I told him that he could rule

Earth with me, so he killed Jeffrey Killian for me, while I watched. It was very interesting to see him die knowing that he was paying for what he did to me ten years ago. Perhaps that is the only emotion that I still retain to a slight degree, the ability to hate. But when it is satisfied by revenge, it is a very pleasurable emotion."

Brand listened with horror to this cold recital, but it was not finished. She went on:

"I had persuaded Jeffrey Killian to commission me as his first lieutenant and now, with him dead, I was able to take command without question. So under the ruse of going out to the flagship to take over command, I led my Martian friend to the cruiser, and told him the truth. Then I shot him in the face. He was a very surprised Martian.

"I told the truth when I said I was calling Commander Wilson. I wanted to know where you were. You have proved a pastime for me more than once, and I would have been very interested in making you become a traitor for love of me. But this way is better. I don't intend to bother you again. You are in a situation that is perfect. Even I could not have figured out a better predicament. It will be interesting to watch what happens to you."

But Martin Brand was no longer listening to the mocking voice. Lurking in the depths of his mind was a response to this jumble of words he'd heard.

He sent the cruiser out into the Black Hole, all lights doused, and

drove it back toward the giant battleship.

The voice of Estelle Carter went on.

"Are you listening, Martin Brand?"

"Yes," he said grimly.

"Good. I am curious to know who Kathleen is? Could it be that the heart-broken, bitter, savage soldier of space found a new love after all? If you did, then it must have been a weak love indeed, to wilt that moment I threw myself into your arms!"

Brand did not answer. Instead he was intent on a giant black bulk looming up ahead of him. He dipped the cruiser down, proceeding slowly and silently in the darkness.

"I see you do not answer me," mocked Estelle. "You are afraid that I will find her and do something to her. That is silly. If she really loves you, and you her, I would not think of destroying the beauty of that love, and the trials and tribulations it will have to endure because of the intolerable situation that exists for you.

"Certainly you can never make her happy. You can never marry her. You can only face the reality of being nobody at all. You haven't even a name you can call your own. As Martin Brand you are dead. As Robert Wales you are a traitor and seditionist, with no rights of citizenship on any world, therefore no right to marry. As Edgar Barnes, you are a murderer, and as such, will be executed if caught, according to Lunar law."

The mocking voice went on. Brand's jaw tightened as he listened,

and he finally maneuvered the cruiser beneath the tremendous belly. Finally he had the ship hanging motionless, then he spoke.

"Listen, Estelle," he said quietly. "I've been letting you talk on, listening to you gloat over me. It's been very interesting to me. I can, of course, only judge you on an emotional basis, since I am not as 'sane' as you are. To me, your present condition is something to pity, and if I feel anything at all about you now, it is a large measure of sympathy.

"I am sure you are not responsible for your actions, and although for a moment I felt that I hated you, now I only pity you. I must destroy you because your warped mind is the most dangerous thing that has ever faced Earth's peace and happiness, and threatened it with permanent destruction.

"Mars may conquer Earth, but wars come and go, and freedom is won again. But if you were to come in power, with your mad mentality, then indeed a sad thing would happen to the world I love.

"That is why I am going to destroy you now!"

For a moment there was silence, then Estelle's voice came to him coldly, with short-clipped words coming from her lips like venom from the fangs of a snake.

"It is you who are mad now, Martin Brand! You speak wildly of destroying. You can destroy nothing! You sit there in a tiny tenman cruiser, hiding like a rat in some hole in the wall. You have at your disposal one

small cannon, which fires an atomic shell capable of smashing only a small destroyer. What can you do to me here in the mightiest battleship in all the solar system? You . . ."

Martin Brand interrupted.

"That atomic cannon you speak of is pointing at the moment straight into the bomb rack of your mighty ship. It will send that atomic shell you speak of straight into the magazine of your battleship. And when it explodes . . ."

"You lie!" shrieked Estelle Carter. "You lie! You are nowhere near."

"Before you die," said Brand, "there is one thing you can think of. What is that emotion in your voice now? I'd call it fear. Fear is a terrible thing, Estelle, and because I pity you, I don't intend to let you suffer any longer. My finger is on the trigger . . ."

Martin Brand pressed the trigger, and with the other hand sent the tiny ten-man cruiser peeling off in a tremendous swooping dive straight out and down into the Black Hole's depths. Behind him a great mushrooming flame grew and grew until it seemed that it would catch up to him and destroy him too. But it tossed him on, like a feather before a gale, and his senses reeled with the awful sensation of a dive almost more than human tissue can stand.

Even through the reeling of his mind, he heard the thunder of the holocaust he had set off behind him. All was flame and light and smoke and bursting sound in the Black Hole. And added to it was a new thunder that was not that of rending metal,

but of shattering rock.

He brought the buffeted cruiser to a steadier pace, and looked back when his sight had cleared enough to see what had happened behind him.

Like a slow-motion move, the whole wall of the crater was toppling over, engulfing all the cataclysmic holocaust of shattered ships as though it had been but a match-flame in the darkness. And many minutes later the whole mass came to rest on the side of the crater and once more darkness fell over the scene.

The Martian armada was no more.

And then, Martin Brand, desperate dare-devil of space, bowed his head in his hand and cried.

The lights of Luna City were bright before him, several hours later, as he brought the cruiser slowly forward. In his mind were crowding the memories of the past hours, and he gave no thought to his own situation. Nor did he do more than glance idly at the small ship that bore down on him now from above and behind. It was only when his radio crackled, and a voice came through the receiver, that he stirred, and the grim immobility of his features changed.

"Lunar patrol ship A-forty calling cruiser below us—land at Luna City spaceport and no tricks. We'll blast you if you make a move!"

Brand drove the ship slowly toward the spaceport and brought it down. The patrol ship landed behind him, and he stepped out to meet the two figures who climbed from it. One of them was familiar, clad in the trim uniform of an Earth Patrol agent,

red hair gleaming under smart military cap, and blue eyes expressionless in her white face . . . Kathleen Dennis.

The officer spoke.

"Robert Wales, alias Edgar Barnes, I arrest you for murder, for attempted sabotage, and for conspiring to destroy the peace of Luna and Earth."

Martin Brand scarcely heard the charges. He was staring at Kathleen Dennis, at the hurt in her eyes, at the disgust on her face, and at the stiff unyielding posture of her trimly uniformed figure.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" he said.

"*You traitor!*" she said in a low voice.

Brand reeled in shock, then stepped forward.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Captain Craig radioed the whole story to Luna Headquarters just before his radio blanked out, just before you shot him down with that Martian cruiser you smuggled into the Black Hole!"

"He was shot down by the Martians!" Brand burst out. "I blew up the magazine of the flagship, and the whole fleet was buried beneath a slide in the Black Hole . . ."

"That'll be enough!" interrupted the Lunar officer. "Come along, Robert Wales. You are under arrest, and I promise you, this time you won't just be exiled. It's execution for you!"

"But I tell you it's true. That's what Captain Craig was trying to radio to Earth headquarters—that he

had seen those battleships in the Black Hole. They were ready to attack. Estelle Carter, completely mad, was in command . . ."

Kathleen's eyes opened wide.

"I see it all now," she said. "I heard that she was released as cured . . ." She turned to the Lunar officer. "This man was exiled from Earth for sedition. He has attempted the same thing here. He has claimed to be Martin Brand, whom you know is dead. It was Martin Brand's old sweetheart he just mentioned. Somewhere he got hold of that, and tried to use it to his own advantage. He is a traitor, and I leave him in your hands."

"We'll take care of him," promised the Lunarian grimly. "He won't be exiled again!"

Kathleen turned to Martin Brand. In her eyes he saw a light that he himself had in his own eyes ten years ago.

"I have a job to do," she said, "and I intend to *do* it!" Then she turned and stalked swiftly away. Martin Brand found his wrists encircled by a pair of handcuffs.

He stared down at them and a whisper escaped his lips.

"The luck of 'Suicide' Martin Brand!" he murmured. "It's run out at last."

He looked at her disappearing back. "It's all right, Kathleen. You'll get over it. But maybe someday you'll know that I had a job to do too, and I *did* it just as you think you are doing yours now in condemning a dangerous traitor!"

■ * ■

It was silent in the tomb. Hal Orson, still deep in thought, became aware that Kathleen's sobs had died away as she stirred restlessly in his arms.

"I'm all right now, Hal."

He released her almost automatically. She looked up at his intent face in the glow of the black light lamp.

"What is it, Hal . . . ?"

"So—they lied to us," he said, a baffled note in his voice. "But why?" He sat down on the marble slab where it lay beside the empty coffin of a Martin Brand who was believed dead by three worlds. Why was it empty? Was it because . . .

"He isn't dead," said Kathleen in a whisper. "That's why they lied. There would be no other reason for it. If he had been executed on Luna as a murderer and a spy, there would have been no reason to lie about Martin Brand's body . . ."

Orson nodded. "I get all that. We of the Service knew Martin wasn't in that tomb to begin with, that his death had been faked. This would avoid any possibility of Luna's linking Robert Wales with Martin Brand, and therefore with Earth politics, and thus uncover the secret of the Special Services and its work on Luna. But why didn't they leave it that way? All of us would have understood anything but this . . ."

"It's simple," said Kathleen. "This way, with everybody in the Service believing that Martin's body had actually been recovered from Luna and put into the tomb it was supposed to occupy, no legend would be built up

about it. No possibility of the fact that it really was empty could get out. It was just a logical precaution."

Orson rose to his feet. "Then where is he? He was useless to the Service for any further work. There'd be no reason to keep away from me! I was his best friend . . ."

"I know why," said Kathleen calmly. "It's because he *wasn't* useless. It's because he's still working for the Service! I know it, as sure as I'm a woman."

"How?"

"Intuition . . . and because you can't love a man for eleven years as I have, without getting so close mentally that you can sense whether he's alive or dead. I *know* he's alive; I can . . . *feel* him."

Orson laid a hand on her arm, gently. "Kathleen, you're a clever girl. You must be able to see the other possibility—that what you feel might just be wishful thinking. Love does strange things to the mind, sometimes . . ."

She whirled and pointed to the coffin. "Is *that* wishful thinking?" she demanded. "What strange thing is happening to *your* mind that makes you see an empty coffin when it's *really* not empty . . ."

"Score for you," said Orson. "I'm not seeing things—that coffin's empty. And there's only one reason for that! What that reason is, we're going to find out . . ." He stopped suddenly and groaned. "Kathy! We've got to get out of here and work fast. Tomorrow, when all this havoc is discovered, there'll be hell to pay! If we're asked, where will

we say we were tonight?"

"This wasn't your idea," she said calmly. "We were in my apartment."

"You say a thing like that, and I'll beat the tar out of you! You won't throw your reputation to the dogs to shield me. I'm no baby, either, Kathy, and don't forget it!"

"I'm not going to let you get into trouble over me!"

"I'm not going to *try* to keep out of trouble. Tomorrow I'm going to *make* trouble!"

"What are you thinking of?" she said sharply. "Whatever it is, I forbid it!"

He grinned at her. "Go ahead and forbid. You don't scare me at all. There's nothing you can do."

She regarded him silently a moment. "Oh, isn't there?"

"No, there isn't. And now, we're getting out of here . . ."

He led the way out into the night.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Orson, but the first available time on Senator Beasley's appointment list is three weeks from today. You can't possibly see him before then."

"Will you pick up that phone," urged Orson, "and simply say Martin Brand can't wait three weeks?"

The secretary looked at Orson, then shrugged. "Maybe after a cryptic remark like that, he'll never want to see you, but if you insist . . ."

"I insist."

The secretary lifted the phone and spoke rapidly into it. Then his eyebrows lifted and he put the receiver down. "I'll take you in," he said. "Senator Beasley said he'd see you

immediately. Whoever Martin Brand is—" The secretary stopped short. "Not the Martin Brand in the rifled tomb!" he exclaimed. "Mister, if you're using this as a gag to see the senator, I'd advise you to start running now, because you'll be in real trouble!"

Orson grinned. "Wouldn't you like to know!"

The secretary flushed and led Orson to a door. He opened it and let Orson through it. Then he backed out, shut the door behind him. Orson faced the man at the desk, a large man with bristling eyebrows and square jaw.

"Sit down," said the senator.

Orson sat down in the chair opposite the desk and remained quiet while the senator eyed him.

"You know," said Senator Beasley, "there's no name more unusual for announcing yourself than that of a famous deceased hero. I should say that unless you have a very good reason I may be forced to ask you quite a few questions."

"When I've asked you the ones I want to ask," said Orson, "I'll be glad to answer any you wish to ask. First, I've read the papers, and I know what they say."

"What do they say?" asked Beasley, folding his hands across his expansive stomach.

"They say that the body of Martin Brand has been stolen from its mausoleum," said Orson. "Only it wasn't."

Senator Beasley slumped down a trifle more in his chair, and his voice remained deep and calm. "You were

with her, then?" he asked.

Orson stiffened with surprise in his chair. "With *her* . . . ?"

"Yes. And you know, as she does, that the coffin never had a body in it," Beasley concluded.

Orson looked at the senator ruefully. "Guess there's not much I can tell you, then," he said, "but how you know, beats me. Where'd you get your information?"

"Fingerprints. You and the girl left them all over the place. Hers were easy to classify, and the identification was placed on my desk an hour ago. I've been expecting your classification to arrive any minute. But you said something about wanting to ask me some questions before I questioned you. I'd be glad to answer them."

"You would?"

Senator Beasley smiled. "Of course. Did you think I'd refuse?"

Orson shrugged. "I don't know what to think. I haven't known what to think ever since I found the coffin empty. You see, Martin Brand was my best friend. I've always mourned him as dead, and it's been something of a shock to find that he wasn't. I don't understand it, sir, and least of all do I understand his not contacting me. That's the first question, sir: where is Martin Brand?"

"On Venus—where Kathleen will be in a few days, unless we stop her."

Orson leaped to his feet. "Kathleen—on Venus! But that's impossible, sir. I just left her a few hours ago."

Beasley unfolded his hands, picked up a piece of paper from his desk and handed it to Orson. "I presume you

are the person for whom this was intended," he said. "We found it in her wastebasket."

Orson snatched the paper. It was unsigned but it was unmistakably in Kathleen's handwriting. It read: *There is only one place he could be, and I am going there. Stay out of it.*

Senator Beasley spoke. "I assume it was her idea, judging from that note."

"But it doesn't say Venus," said Orson. "How do you assume that's what she meant? And I'm in it as much as she is."

"Is she in love with him?"

"With a broken heart!" emphasized Orson.

"And are you in love with her?"

Orson stared at the senator. "In love with her—? You mean you think that's why I helped her?"

"Is it?"

Orson looked thoughtful. "If Martin were dead, maybe I might think of it. But now that he's alive . . ."

"I see. Well, lad, let's have the rest of those questions."

"Why has the government resorted to this—this flummery?"

"The government hasn't resorted to it. I handled the whole thing—at the request of the President. You, I presume, are a member of Special Services?"

"I joined when Martin was—killed."

"Then you know why it was done, and why only the President and I know there was no body to be stolen," said Beasley. "Now we'll have to resort to some more—flummery—and pretend to find the body,

apprehend the grave robbers, and restore Mr. Brand to his mythical resting place."

"You're being quite frank," said Orson. "Why?"

"Because you are the grave robber," said Beasley quietly. "I'm afraid that with the evidence, including your own confession, nobody'd listen to a crazy story that the tomb was empty—especially when we find the body where you hid it."

Orson sat quietly for a moment, considering the senator. "I see," he said finally. "It's an excellent bit of—flummery. But I have one more question . . ."

"Ask it."

"Can I go to Venus too?"

There was a long silence in the room, and finally the senator seemed to have made a decision. He leaned forward and pressed a button on his desk.

"Just as soon as you've been executed," he said.

Kathleen sat sipping a cocktail in the bar of the Venus de Milo cafe in Venus City. She remembered the weird experience of flying her own private ship into the milky atmosphere of Venus, almost sixty miles in depth, where visibility was still as much as twenty miles, and coming out finally from the stratosphere into the perpetual rosy dawn-light that is Venus' day. She still marveled at the pink orb of the sun, a vague rosy spot in the milk-white.

She remembered, too, the glimpse she had caught of the Patrol ship

slipping quietly out of the milk-and-honey twenty miles behind her. She was almost sure they had been following her, and yet she had cleared the spaceport without the slightest trouble. She'd gambled on that—the Special Service wouldn't have risked publicity by trying to stop her officially—they'd stop her some other way. So she'd left the tarmac as soon as her papers had cleared. That had been several days ago.

Now, sitting in the Venus de Milo, she felt sure they'd never recognize her. Her coppery hair was jet black, her eyes were slanted back, pulled into that position by invisible strips of tape that were concealed by her hairdo. Her fingers were joined by tiny webs that extended half-way out to the first knuckles, and the tiny moons in her fingernails were a brilliant green in color. Her complexion was faintly green also, as though her blood had been tinted beneath the skin, as indeed it had. This effect was achieved by a new chlorophyll dye that turned the red corpuscles green without impairing their oxygen-carrying abilities. This effect would last for several days before a renewed injection of dye was necessary.

From all outward appearances, Kathleen was a Venusian, her disguise so perfect that not even a Venusian could detect any difference. She knew, however, that a member of Special Services would have little trouble spotting her. She was counting on the necessity for secrecy about the Special Service to protect her until she had discovered what she

wanted to know.

Seated around a table in a corner of the cafe were four Venusians, conversing rapidly in low tones. Kathleen had been watching them ever since they came in, just as she had watched them the first day. Now they seemed to be aware of her. Several times she caught them glancing in her direction, and conversing with faint frowns immediately thereafter.

Finally one of them got up and sauntered toward her. Kathleen watched him come, observing his reflection in the big mirror behind the bar. There was something oddly familiar about him, but try as she would, she could not place him. He was a Venusian, that was apparent, for a Martian could not possibly pose as a Venusian—she started—or he could be an Earthman in disguise. As he seated himself beside her, she was suddenly sure of it. Inwardly she felt an exultation; it meant she was on the right track. She knew now that the four were fifth columnists.

"You're new here, aren't you?" the man asked, his voice strangely husky and familiar. There was a haunting timbre to it that wandered through her memory as though searching for something.

"I don't believe I know you," she said, regarding his reflection in the glass, then sipping her drink casually.

He grinned at her. "That can be remedied," he said, "besides it's a shame for so lovely a girl to be drinking alone."

"I don't make friends easily—with strangers," she said, turning to look

at him. As her eyes met his, that haunting sensation of familiarity heightened, and a tremor shot through her body. Suddenly she found herself breathing more swiftly, and for no real reason she felt afraid. Of what? Not of a Venusian spy, or a Martian fifth columnist—or of her life . . . What then?

He half-turned on his stool. "Then perhaps we'd better remain strangers," he said. "I don't judge people by their names—and actually names mean nothing, so, if you'd prefer . . ." He slid off the stool with a polite nod.

"Wait," she said.

He stood looking at her.

"Now that you're here, you might as well have a drink with me."

"Why?"

Kathleen stared at him in surprise. Suddenly she felt a surge of anger rise in her throat. He was looking at the slow flood of green suffusing her white throat, and strangely there was a look of scorn in his eyes.

"What kind of a man are you?" she flared.

"Generally I like to be alone," he said. "I'm a very bad judge of female character—and perhaps I've judged wrong again. If you'll pardon me . . ." He bowed slightly, stiffly, and made his way back to his three companions.

Kathleen tossed off her drink with an angry gesture, then climbed down from her stool and marched over to the table. She faced the Venusian squarely. "My name," she said stiffly, "is Kay deNees. And I like to be alone too." She turned and walked stiffly from the cafe. As she passed

a large mirror near the doorway, she saw the Venusian staring at her retreating back. In his eyes was a peculiar expression and he looked puzzled, as though he were trying to remember something also. Kathleen frowned. She felt more sure than ever now that somewhere before she had seen this Venusian—and he hadn't been a Venusian then. Who was he? As she walked slowly down the street outside, she searched her memory diligently, but without success.

So occupied was she with her thoughts that she was unaware of the swift approach of a dark figure until strong arms lifted her off her feet and hustled her toward a waiting car. She screamed shrilly once then a belated hand clapped over her mouth. She promptly bit the hand and screamed again. As she was thrust into the waiting car and seized by two Earthmen, she saw the door to the cafe burst open. The man who had accosted her at the bar dashed out and stood watching as the car drove away in a burst of speed.

For a moment Kathleen was silent, studying the faces of her captors. "For Special Services men, you aren't very efficient," she observed. "You let me scream my head off. If Commander Wilson were alive, you'd be doing guard duty as buck privates back in Kansas City."

Suddenly she slumped down in the seat and began to cry. "Now I'll never find him," she said, her voice muffled by her sobs. "Why couldn't you let me alone?"

One of the men handed her a hand-

kerchief. "You'd have been dead by tomorrow morning if we hadn't snatched you, Miss Dennis. You just don't know what you were getting into. That mob had you spotted, and our man reported this morning they were going to check you today. If you didn't measure up you'd be eliminated as a precautionary measure. And, who are you trying to find? . . . Say! Don't tell me you're looking for the guy who stole Martin Brand's body? If you are, you're behind the times. They found the body the day after you left Earth, and the man who stole it has been executed. If you ask me, the dirty grave-robber got off easy . . ."

The Special Services man stopped speaking in alarm and stared at Kathleen's white face. "Joe," he said to his companion, "she really did love the guy. She's fainted!"

His companion began to chafe Kathleen's wrists. "Yeah," he said sympathetically. "Ain't it a shame some people never get any breaks? Imagine a girl taking chances with her life this way looking for the body of her dead lover. She must have known it was just plain suicide . . ."

Several hours later Kathleen sat staring at the plain furnishings of an office in the Federal Building. Her mind refused to consider the horrible news she had heard, and her eyes were dry. So, when the door opened and a man entered, she paid him scarce attention.

"How do you feel now?" the newcomer asked.

"All right, I suppose," said Kath-

been dully. Then she turned to look at her visitor and stiffened in shock. The man facing her was one of the four Venusians she had been spying upon at the Venus de Milo cafe.

"Yes," he said. "I thought you'd recognize me. Actually, however, I'm Don Coleridge, a member of Special Services. I've been on the inside with the fifth column for several months now. So, when you showed up, I knew the score."

"What are you doing here, then?" she asked, wonderingly. "Won't this spoil everything for you?"

"I don't think they'll find out. But I had to do something—don't you realize you were under suspicion? When the decision was made to kill you, I had to act to save your life. So I notified my superior officer and had you arrested. That way, we hope, suspicion will be thrown off you."

Kathleen shrugged. "What good will it do now? I'm useless to everybody."

"Not at all. You'll find out about that in a few minutes. I'm going to leave now, but my purpose in coming here was to prove to you that I am on your side. Next time we meet, you'll know that, but you won't give any sign. From now on, you're working with me."

"Working with you?"

The disguised Venusian nodded and turned toward the door. "The superior officer will give you the details of the plan. Meanwhile, best of luck. And remember, I'll be handling the affair from the other end so you needn't be frightened. When you see me again, I will be Lieutenant For-

sythe." He bowed himself out and closed the door.

An instant later the door opened again. A man stepped in backward and closed the door before he turned.

"Hal!" shrieked Kathleen. "Hal Orson!"

"Not so loud!" said Orson in consternation. "Nobody here knows I'm Hal Orson."

Kathleen rushed forward and threw herself into his arms. "They told me you'd been executed," she gasped. "Oh Hal, I've been going through hell thinking about it."

"I know," he said, disengaging himself gently, "but it had to be that way."

Kathleen stood looking at him for an instant, then her eyes clouded and she sat down and cried quietly for a few moments. Orson stood looking down at her silently until she had finished.

"Ready for work now?"

She looked up at him and nodded. "What kind of work?"

Orson sat down beside her. "That Venusian who was just in to see you," he explained, "is one of our men. He's gotten pretty high in the enemy intelligence circle and this is all his plan. He saved your life by pulling this fake arrest; now he's arranging to 'rescue' you."

"Rescue me?"

"Yes. Tonight you'll be placed in a cell in the Federal Building jail and about midnight a group of Venusians will raid the place to free you. They'll encounter little resistance, a careless guard, and a great deal of overconfidence on our part. They'll

succeed in rescuing you. After that, you'll be, we hope, another member of the SS in the enemy circle.

"But what good will I be?" asked Kathleen.

Orson grinned at her. "What you've got is exactly what we need now. You have no idea how effective a beautiful woman will be in prying secrets from these Venusians. They go for a pretty face and figure like nobody's business. I think you know how to handle yourself to best advantage there."

Kathleen frowned. "I'm not so sure. I've had a little experience with one of those fellows already. He gave me the most beautiful brush-off I've ever gotten. If you ask me, there are some Venusians who could make a marble Venus shiver in a steam bath."

"He was only the fellow picked to 'feel you out' as it were, and decide if you were spying on them or not. He had no intentions of making up to you."

Kathleen looked dubious. "He wasn't acting a part. That fellow really is a lone wolf. I played coy for just one sentence and he froze me off like . . ." Kathleen knit her eyebrows. "I've seen that man somewhere before, but I can't place him at all."

"Um," said Orson. "I don't like that . . ."

Kathleen looked at him quickly. "Never mind," she said. "It makes no difference. I'm sure he doesn't know me. The way he acted proved it. There'll be no danger."

Orson laughed drily. "No danger! Kathy, you're in the most dangerous

game in the Solar System now, and there's no doubt about it. We're all playing with the biggest potential explosion ever imagined—and if we don't manage to touch it off where it's harmless, it'll be the end for more than we few SS men. Kathy, if we don't stop these fellows, it's curtains for Earth. What we've learned about what the Martians have on tap for us is . . . well, frightening. We've got to know when and where the first blow will fall, because the first blow will likely be the last. That's what you and I and Coleridge will be trying to find out."

"I'll do my best," said Kathleen.

Orson flashed a convincing smile and rose to go. "I know you will, Kathy. And Kathy . . ."

"Yes?"

"I don't know where, but I know for sure that Martin is on Venus right now, alive and well. Headquarters lost all track of him because he requested to be entirely on his own, and we won't hear from him until he has something positive to report if by any chance you run across him . . ."

Kathleen went white.

" . . . don't do anything to give either of you away," finished Orson. "Don't let on by the slightest sign that you know who he is, or let him know about you—until it's all over. Of course, I don't think you'll meet him—the chances are extremely remote—but if you do . . ."

"You don't think I'd risk his life again, do you, Hal?" Kathleen said in strained tones. "I'd die first!"

"I hope you don't," said Orson,

wheeling abruptly and striding from the room.

The long hours until midnight dragged interminably for Kathleen, lying on her bunk in the cell, trying desperately to get some sleep but failing utterly to compose her mind.

"Martin," she whispered into the darkness. "Oh Martin, if only I can find you—see you just once more . . ."

She lay there, thinking, her eyes full of tears, but her heart full of hope. Outside, in the corridor, the sound of footsteps aroused her. They stopped at her door, and she heard the sound of a key grating in the lock.

"Come on out, Miss deNees," said a soft voice. "We're taking you out of here."

She recognized the voice as that of Don Coleridge. As she stepped through the cell doorway, she saw the jailer standing with his arms slightly elevated, keeping a calculating and careful eye on the two men who stood beside him. One of two masked Venusians had a steam gun trained on the jailer. Kathleen decided this one was Don Coleridge.

"Thank you," she said. "I don't know why you're doing this, but I appreciate it."

"We can make mistakes too, sometimes," he said. "But come on, we've got to step lively. This is the quiet period around here, but it'll be tough if this fellow manages to spread the alarm. We'll just have to silence him for awhile . . ."

Swiftly he chopped down with his

gun at the neck of the jailer, and with a moan the fellow dropped to the floor. The rescuers shoved him into the cell and locked the door, then motioned Kathleen to follow them down the corridor. They went down a side corridor and emerged finally in a driveway where a cab stood waiting. They got into it and the driver drew the car away from the curb without a word.

For several minutes no one spoke, then Don Coleridge removed his mask and placed it in his pocket.

His companion did the same. "That was almost too easy," he said.

Coleridge grunted. "It was, Farrow, but I guess we were lucky. Or, I should say, you were lucky, Miss deNees. Do you realize that you'd have been in the toughest spot imaginable if the Earthmen could have pinned anything concrete on you?"

Kathleen said nothing.

"Okay," acknowledged Coleridge. "At least you're smart. But, you can trust us, if you will. As a matter of fact, you have no other choice now. If you aren't on our side, you'll be in a much worse fix than if we'd left you there—but we figured anybody *they* were mad at, ought to be a friend of ours."

Kathleen shrugged. "I'm on nobody's side but my own. It's just that I hate Earthmen's guts—that's all."

Coleridge regarded her calculatingly for a moment. "Maybe you'd like a job," he said. "Maybe you'd like to do something *they* wouldn't enjoy."

"What's in it?" asked Kathleen.

Farrow laughed. "Money," he said.

"Isn't that what you want?"

Kathleen read the inflection in his voice right, and turned to stare into his eyes. "Money isn't everything," she said. "But it's almost everything when you haven't got it. Can you think of a good substitute?"

The sudden glint that came into Farrow's eyes told Kathleen she was on the right track. He said nothing, however, and she sank back into her seat, satisfied that she had discovered at least one weak spot in the enemy armor.

The cab left the city. Once on the highway outside the residential area, it crept off onto a side road. There, in the dark, a transfer was made to an aerocar, which took off immediately on a course directly over the Venusian jungles.

Kathleen glanced at Coleridge and he interpreted her look correctly.

"Venus City is no place for any of us, from now on. We can't afford to take any chances. You'd be picked up in a minute back there. And we can't be sure how smart that jailer was, or how much he'll remember of us."

"Should have killed him," said Farrow.

"You're too bloodthirsty," said Coleridge.

"Not bloodthirsty; just practical—and smart."

Coleridge looked at Farrow quizzically, but said nothing more. Kathleen felt a sudden misgiving and she tried to study Farrow without seeming to be too interested in him.

Several hours later the aerocar set

down in a tiny clearing in the forest, and the three made their way into a tiny hut. Inside, Coleridge touched a rustic table that was securely fastened to the floor. The entire floor began to sink slowly into the ground; they were on a cleverly concealed elevator.

At the bottom they stepped off. The floor returned to its original level, and as it did so, a light came on. Kathleen saw they were at the end of a dim tunnel that led a short way into the earth before it turned. They followed the tunnel and entered a large, brilliantly lighted room. It was plainly furnished. Behind a large desk sat a saturnine-faced Martian.

"Here they are, sir," said Farrow, saluting.

Coleridge froze in his tracks for a brief instant, then saluted also and stood facing the Martian. Kathleen gave Coleridge one swift glance, then faced the Martian. Something had gone wrong here—definitely wrong.

"You may go, Farrow," said the Martian.

Farrow saluted again. He whirled on his heel, and walked back the way they had come. As he passed Coleridge and Kathleen he grinned knowingly and one derisive whispered word reached their ears.

"Smart."

Coleridge tried to bluff it out. "This is Miss Kay deNees," he said. "She was picked up by Earth Secret Service men, so we decided we couldn't risk them keeping her. As it turned out, sir, she is perfectly willing to work with us, and in my opinion we can put her to good use."

The Martian smiled. "I'm sure we can. As a matter of fact, we have *already* put her to excellent use. You Earthmen can't keep your heads in the presence of a pretty woman. If you could, perhaps we'd never be able to detect a spy in our midst."

Coleridge had gone white, but Kathleen's eyes widened in astonishment and she whirled on Coleridge. "An Earthman!" she exclaimed. "Is this true?" Her astonishment turned to fury. "So, you tricked me! You Earthmen are all the same. Rescue me, will you! Now you've really gotten me into trouble. Whatever's going on here, it strikes me as pretty dangerous, but if it's what I think it is, I'm all for it!—if that filthy, rotten mind of yours hasn't got me a jungle grave!"

The Martian regarded her with amusement. "I can see, Miss deNees, why your superiors thought you could achieve success in a mission against us," he said. "You are clever, and a very good actress. Unfortunately for you, however, we have some clever men on our side. Mr. Farrow very neatly uncovered the whole plot. As a matter of fact, he even has a series of interesting microphotos of your consultation with your companion in espionage in the Federal building back in Venus City. When he showed them to me, I accepted his suggestion that we appear to fall for the plan, and bring about your rescue. That way, we'd bag both of you with a minimum amount of trouble—with actual SS assistance as a matter of fact."

The Martian pressed a buzzer and

an orderly entered. "Send me Captain Lutain and ask Lieutenant Farrow to come back in, please."

In a moment Farrow and Lutain entered. Kathleen recognized the captain at once as the man who had accosted her at the Venus de Milo.

"Gentlemen," said the Martian, "we have here two spies. I am detailing one of them to each of you. Farrow, you will take the gentleman, and when you have taken him deep into the jungle, kill him and bury him in the quicksand. Lutain, you will do the lovely, if detestible, Miss deNees the same service."

Captain Lutain spoke up. "If you would be so kind," he said, "I'd rather you'd spare me the task sir. Were she an Earthwoman, I'd have no compunctions, but since she is a Venusian, I'd rather not."

The Martian laughed. "She's not a Venusian, but no matter. As a matter of fact, on second thought, I want to confer with you. Mission E is due to get underway on secret orders which may come within forty-eight hours. I'll appoint another man . . ."

Farrow saluted and spoke. "Sir, there will be no need. I can take care of both spies. I started this matter, and I'd like the honor of finishing it."

The Martian's eyes lit in approval. "You're a good man, Farrow, but you must use dispatch. As a member of Mission E, it will be necessary that you return before the orders come."

Farrow's eyes lighted with a feral glow. "I'll be here sir! I wouldn't miss being in on the big . . ."

"That will do, Farrow. You had best be quick about your assignment if you want to be sure of that."

Farrow smiled gloatingly and produced his steam pistol. "All right, you two," he said, "walk ahead of me down the corridor. I know a quicksand deposit only a few hours away . . ."

Kathleen, her heart in her throat, turned to walk down the corridor ahead of the prodding steam gun. She saw Captain Lutain staring at her again with that same puzzled look in his eyes. He took one impulsive step forward, then halted, shaking his head.

The Martian misinterpreted his motion. "Farrow can take care of it, Captain," he said with a wave of his hand. "Besides, I want to check a few things with you right now."

Kathleen squared her shoulders and marched into the gloomy corridor, a vague remembrance hammering at her memory for recognition, but there was no response—once more she failed to place the strange feeling she had when she looked at the Venusian captain.

The orderly standing before Commander Hal Orson's desk in the Federal Building at Venus City saluted.

"What is it?" asked Orson.

"There's a gentleman, a Venusian, here to see you, sir. He insists that it is extremely important, and he refuses to give his name."

Orson nodded. "All right. Send him in, but stay on guard with your steam gun ready. We've had enough trouble with Venusians here already."

The orderly wheeled and went out, returning in a moment with a Venusian dressed in plain clothes.

The Venusian halted in his tracks, a look of stunned astonishment on his face as he saw Orson. "My God!" he said. "Hal!"

"That will be all!" said Orson sharply. "Orderly, please withdraw, but remain on call." The orderly withdrew.

Orson faced the Venusian. "Now," he said. "Who the devil are you?"

The Venusian grinned. "What's the matter, Hal? You seem mighty coy about your name, all of a sudden. Back on Earth, in the SS, you used it without any qualms—don't tell me you've got in trouble, too, and had to give up being yourself? And since when can't a man address his former bunkmate by his first name?"

"Martin!" exclaimed Orson. "*Martin Brand!*"

With one bound he was out from behind the desk and flung his arms around the tall figure. Then he grasped Martin's hand and pumped it up and down "You old rascal!" he almost sobbed. "You son of a gun! Damn your conscienceless hide . . ." He broke off, unable to continue.

"What are you doing here?" asked Brand, returning his handclasp with equal vehemence. "I hardly expected my old pal to be in command in Venus City."

"I'm not your old pal," said Orson. "I was executed for grave-robbing back on Earth, and now I'm just as much a non-entity as you are. I'm commander here because I know too much to be anywhere else. I know

almost as much as you do about this affair."

"Grave-robbing?" asked Brand with a puzzled look. "What on Earth would you be doing robbing graves?"

Orson swallowed uncomfortably. "That's a long story, Martin, and . . ."

"Then it'll keep," said Brand. "What I've got to tell you is much more important, and I haven't much time. Hal, this is serious, the most serious thing that can happen; and we've only one way out: The Martians are sending in a big battleship, but it's the fastest thing in space, and there's not one chance in a million of intercepting it, or even of destroying it if we could intercept it—without knowing exactly what its course to Earth would be."

Orson looked puzzled. "One battleship? You mean they're attacking Earth with *one* ship? I can't see how that could make a great deal of difference even if they get through. It just can't get them anywhere . . ."

"*This* can! Hal, that ship is nothing but a generator ship—and the biggest thing you ever saw. It's sole purpose is to generate an impulse, from one Earth diameter out, that will cover the whole globe. That impulse will detonate hydrogen-bombs concealed in every great city, in every important area on Earth! These bombs have been hidden during the past five years by Venusian freighters, traders, and importers. Once that generator ship gets within eight thousand miles of Earth, our power to resist will be ended! The Martians will be able to come in at will and take over."

Orson, his face gray, went back behind his desk and sat down heavily. "What will we do?" he asked. "What *can* we do?"

"I've been assigned to that detonator ship," said Brand. "I'm one of the most trusted men in the whole plan. Don't ask me how I did it. Take it from me, if it's humanly possible, that ship will not reach the Earth, or anywhere near it. I've made all my plans, and it's a one-man job. Even if I succeed, that would only remedy the matter temporarily. Another ship is nearly ready to go, and I've just learned where it is. You've got to finish things up here. You've got to destroy that ship, and round up the fifth column on Venus. I've got a list and location of all the big shots here—" Brand tossed a notebook down on the desk "—and if you ever acted with a high hand, now is the time. Call in the Space Patrol fleet, and radio for the War Fleet. Declare war on Venus if they won't cooperate. But *get* those fellows and that second ship!"

Orson picked up the notebook and stuffed it in his pocket. "I'll tear Venus apart," he said savagely. "I'll get every last one of them; and no other detonator ship will leave Venus, you can bank on that; But, Martin, what about Kathleen—and Coleridge?"

Martin Brand stared blankly at Orson. "Kathleen?" he asked. "What about her? And who's Coleridge?"

"You . . . don't know?" faltered Orson.

A peculiar expression crossed

Brand's face. "I don't know a thing," he said. "Out with it, man. What's on your mind?"

"You mean you, a member of the fifth-column group, didn't know that we had another SS man in the group? His Venusian name is Forsythe . . ."

Brand's face went pasty. "Forsythe . . ." he whispered. "Did you say Forsythe?"

Orson didn't answer. He saw in Brand's face that there was no need.

"So *that's* what bothered me when I saw her walk away from me . . ." said Brand in stunned tones. "How could I have failed to recognize the swing of those proud shoulders . . .?" His voice failed and he stood as though stricken with vocal paralysis.

"Martin," said Orson. "What's wrong . . .?"

Slowly Martin Brand drew in his breath, then he sighed in a great shuddering gust. His face took on a set of utter pain and despair. "She's . . . been executed," he said in almost unrecognizable tones. "Forsythe was detected by Lieutenant Farrow. Farrow knew all about him, and carried out a plan to trap Forsythe and the new operative he was bringing in. I never suspected who it was. I didn't recognize her, even when I was picked to question her before the fake arrest you fellows pulled. She fooled me both ways—I thought she was just a Venusian trollop . . ."

He whirled on Orson. "Why'd she come here?" he asked. "Nobody back on Earth would have sent her where I was. It would have been too dangerous to me, now that I was the key man here. *How* could she have

come?"

"It was all her idea," said Orson hoarsely. "All along she kept insisting you weren't dead, and finally she made up her mind to find out. She told me she was going to open your coffin and find out if you were really there. There was no talking her out of it, so I did the next best thing; I went with her. Naturally your body wasn't in the coffin."

"She figured Venus was the only place you could have gone, and that you were still working for the SS or you'd have contacted me or her. So, without telling me, she took her own private ship to Venus.

"I went to Senator Beasley and made a clean breast of the whole matter—which was hardly necessary; they had both of us ticketed already, from our fingerprints in the tomb. It wound up with me going to Venus on this job, a fake story about your body being recovered, and my own execution so I could come here without suspicion.

"That's the whole story . . ." Orson stopped speaking.

Brand's face had become stony. "Kathy was always that way," he said emotionlessly. "She had three strikes against her the minute she fell in love with me. I'm death to everybody I come near, but this'll be the last time. This time it's 'suicide' Martin Brand for sure—because that's what blowing up the detonator ship will be, for me. Without Kathy, I don't want to go any further . . ."

He thrust out his hand and Orson took it wordlessly. "So long, Hal. Get those babies for me, will you?"

You can be sure I'll take care of my end of the job. Kathy never shirked her duty when she saw it. The least I can do is finish her job off the way she would have."

Orson swallowed hard as he said, "Goodbye, Martin. Don't worry about my end of it. Venus will be scoured clean of these vermin within twenty-four hours, and if I can get hold of that fellow Farrow, I'll skin him inch by inch and layer by layer."

"That's part of my job," said Brand. "He'll be on the big ship with me. Only thing I'll regret is dirtying up Space with his atoms."

One long instant both men looked at each other levelly, then Brand spun on his heel and almost ran from the room.

Hal Orson swore mightily and snatched up his desk phone.

The ceaseless drip of water from the dark green leaves of the lush vegetation in the Venusian jungle formed a whispering background for the *slosh slosh* of Kathleen's feet through the mud as she stumbled along ahead of Don Coleridge. Behind Coleridge came Farrow, his handsome face still sardonic and gloating. During the two hours he had urged them along the muddy trail, there had been no chance for escape. Farrow was as alert as a fox, and his finger was constantly on the trigger of his steam gun.

Now his voice barked out. "Stop. This is where we get off."

Kathleen halted, but did not turn around. She stood hopelessly, looking at the leafy jungle all around her.

Coleridge, however, turned on Farrow heavily.

"You'd better get me the first shot, Farrow," he said. "Because I'm going to kill you if you don't. Once these fingers wrap your neck, it'll take more than a steam gun to get me loose."

Farrow laughed. "Heroics, eh?" he sneered. "Tell you what I'll do—I'll give you a fighting chance. I'll toss my other steam gun at your feet. If you can pick it up and fire it before you're dead, you might even hit me, who knows?"

"You haven't that much sporting blood in you!" exploded Coleridge.

"No?" asked Farrow. "Well, start jumping, friend. *Here's the gun!*" With a swift motion he drew his second steam gun from its holster and tossed it toward Coleridge. He waited until Coleridge's fingers had closed on the gun.

Coleridge stretched himself out full length in the mud. Like lightning he snatched the gun. Without trying to get up, he leveled it and pressed the trigger. Nothing happened!

Farrow laughed contemptuously. "Only an Earthman would be idiot enough even to consider the possibility that anyone would risk his life on that sort of sporting deal." With a sneer he pressed the trigger of his steam gun and Coleridge shuddered once, then lay still. }

Kathleen, who had faced the two when the conversation had begun, looked at Farrow calmly, repressing a shudder with every ounce of her self control.

"Do you need to shoot me?" she asked.

Farrow lifted his eyebrows. "That's an odd question," he said. "Why do you put it that way?"

"Because maybe you've made a mistake."

"I never make mistakes."

"You've ascertained positively that I was working with him?" she asked.

He looked at her a moment. "I see what you mean. Well, does it make any difference?"

"Not any more," she said bitterly. "It might have, back at the cafe Venus de Milo."

"Just what difference might it have made?" There was a slight frown on his face.

She shrugged. "I was watching you . . ." She let her voice trail off.

Farrow stared at her thoughtfully for a moment. "That's true," he said, a peculiar light in his eyes. "You were looking at me a great deal." He was still an instant longer, then he said bluntly. "Why?"

She looked at the ground and answered, "Why does a woman look at a man?"

"Maybe in this case because she was a spy," he suggested.

"That's why I said it didn't make any difference now," she said. "Go ahead; get it over with. I can see you'll follow your orders regardless . . ."

His jaw tightened a bit and a flush of anger began to creep up from his neck. "I'm not exactly the flunky you think I am," he snapped. "I don't follow orders, I give them."

Kathleen felt a slow surge of hope

rise within her. "In this case you are following them," she said. "Your boss, the Martian, ordered you to kill me. Neither he nor you know whether I'm a spy or not, but that seems to make no difference. Coleridge butted into my life, and now I'm going to pay for it . . ." She looked at the body on the ground and her eyes blazed for a moment, then they dulled again and the hopeless tone crept back into her voice. "Besides, it's too late . . ."

Farrow began walking slowly toward her, a strange light in his eyes. His gaze was devouring her figure, appraising her again and again. He jammed the steam gun into her stomach and held it there, his finger on the trigger.

"Nobody's giving me orders," he said. "I do things because I want to, and when I want to do a thing, I do it. That fat Martian back there means nothing to me—except that my position now assures me of at least a governorship back on Earth when we take over—and that'll be very soon now. As a matter of fact, I'll be one of the few top Venusians on Earth. Not even the old Earth Romans will be able to hold a candle to the spot I'll be in."

"If you're trying to torture me, you can forget about it," she blazed at him. "What difference does it make to me whether your position on Earth is better than an Emperor's? Go ahead and kill me. Follow out your orders and get it over with."

"I don't follow orders," he repeated. "I give them." He pressed the gun more firmly against her and

moved closer. "For instance, kiss me!"

She looked up at him. She tossed her hair back with a defiant gesture. "Why not?" she said. "I was thinking of it back at the Venus de Milo—when it might have meant something . . ."

She flung her arms around his neck and placed her lips against his. She kissed him passionately once, then dropped her arms and looked down. Her face flushed, and she held her breath tightly to make it grow even more so. "Now go ahead and kill me," she said.

For reply he laughed. "I'm giving the orders, not you. Here, help me toss this body into the quicksand." He sheathed his gun and waited.

Kathleen looked at him, then looked at the crumpled body of Don Coleridge. "It'll be a pleasure," she said.

When they had dragged the body off the trail and shoved it into the quicksand bog just beyond its edge, they stood watching the body sink slowly out of sight. Farrow looked at Kathleen a long moment.

"One thing I'm sure of," he said.

"What's that?"

"You aren't a spy, but you *are* my kind of woman."

"I don't know how you're going to manage it," she said, "but if you do, you won't regret it."

He licked his lips. "I'll manage it," he said, "and come to think of it, you *will* make a lovely Empress!"

The ponderous power of the giant, atom-propelled Martian warship

shoved her through the void like a giant fist, aimed directly at the Earth. Behind lay Venus, a giant white ball in space, already several million miles astern.

Martin Brand stared back at it through the portholes of the belly deck and shook his head. He bit his lip savagely and turned away from the white planet almost angrily. His face was grim and drawn. With an effort he thrust down the vision of a proud Irish face surrounded by a cloud of turbulent red hair, and curiously superimposed over it the slant eyes and pale green complexion of a Venusian girl.

"She did her job," he whispered. "Now it's up to me to do mine."

He made his way slowly toward midship and finally came to the bomb section. Here, on networks of steel rails, rested the atomic bomb armament of the ship, ready to be launched in rocket warheads. There were hundreds of them here, capable of devastating the cities of a whole planet, once they could be launched from a range where accurate aim was possible. These would be the bombs with which this and other, but smaller Martian ships would finish up operations on remaining Earth centers of resistance, once the giant detonator generators located in the bow of the ship sent out the fatal impulse that would make raging atomic infernos of hundreds of strategic areas on Earth.

When that impulse went out, the death blow to Earth's resistance would have been dealt. No matter how many Martian battleships, converging on

Earth after the big blast, were destroyed by Earth's mighty space navy, it would be meaningless, with no further bases of supply for that navy. Once out of fuel, they would be drifting hulks at the mercy of the enemy. And Mars, right now, was on the other side of the sun, too far away for successful counter-attack.

Brand looked at the atomic arsenal before him, gazed calculatingly at the bomb bays through which the rockets would dart when launched—and nodded grimly. Before him rose the vision of a battleship almost as big as this one, inside the Black Hole on Luna. Once more he heard Estelle Carter's voice ringing in its madness in his ears as he crept closer to the belly of her ship. He lived again the gigantic flash that marked the detonation of her bombs, exploded by his atomic barrage from the lone rifle in his stolen cruiser. These big ships were amazingly vulnerable, provided they could be approached. Out in space this was impossible, but in the Black Hole it had been easy—just as it would be comparatively easy to do it here. He would merely launch himself into space in the auxiliary cruiser, and fire instantly he cleared the ship and could bring the bomb bays into line. He would have at most a minute or two, before the automatic radar-operated guns would blow his cruiser to bits.

Either way, it was the end for Martin Brand. He didn't intend to take any chances on being hit before he could explode those bombs. Given three minutes, he might stand a chance to get away, but he didn't in-

tend to take those three minutes.

Carefully he considered his chances. On this giant battleship were less than fifty men. Almost all of the great ship was robot-controlled. In space warfare, little was risked in the way of manpower. Also, in automatic operation there was almost no chance of such failure as might occur from the human element. Accordingly, Brand could make his way about the giant ship with little chance of meeting another of the crew. Since the take-off, he had observed carefully just what and where each man's duties were. He was satisfied that he knew the time schedule of every man in this section of the ship.

He glanced at his watch. In one hour he would make the attempt.

As he thought of it, he felt cold.

"All right, you can come out now."

Farrow released the catch on the ventilated container and lifted the cover. With one hand he helped Kathleen clamber out of her hiding place in the storage hold of the ship. Then he stepped back and stared at her as she straightened her rumpled clothes and brushed out her hair as best she could with her fingers.

"You look beautiful even in the morning," he observed. "If you look that good coming out of a packing box, you really ought to be a sensation coming out of swan's down and silk."

"Where are we?" asked Kathleen, advancing toward him and nestling against his shoulder.

"Out in space."

"I know that," she pouted. She slid

her arms around his neck and kissed him.

He pushed her away. "I'd better answer your question first," he said. "That is, if you're really interested."

She shrugged. "It doesn't make much difference. But I would like to know how long I'm going to be cooped up here."

"We'll be landing on Luna, which will be surrendered to us just as soon as they realize what's happened to Earth, in about two Earth days. And when we land, you'll come off this ship like you came on—in that box. Once you're off, you'll be a free woman, and I'll pick you up when I've finished my work. After that . . ."

"Your assignment to an Earth area as governor!" she exclaimed. "What area do you think you'll get?"

"I've expressed a preference for the United States area," he said. "And, quite frankly, they could hardly give me less. I rank second only to Captain Lutain."

"Who's he?" asked Kathleen petulantly. "Why should you rank second to anybody?"

Farrow reached out and pulled her to him. "Maybe you've got something there," he said admiringly. "Why should I? I think something may be done about that, but don't worry about it. Right now, how about continuing that kiss where you left off? We've got about an hour before I've got to be back at my station."

"Nobody will bother us here?"

He grinned. "Nobody."

Kathleen glanced around the storage hold. "Isn't there anything to

drink in this place?" she complained. "Ought to be something here . . ."

Farrow lifted his eyebrows. "Say, baby, maybe there is at that. As a matter of fact, the Martian has a stock of the best brought along with him wherever he goes. Maybe it's here."

He walked up and down the storage racks, and finally exclaimed in pleasure. "Here it is!" He ripped open a carton and produced a bottle. Kathleen came to his side, took it and kissed him. "Better take another one," she suggested, "we might need it."

As Farrow turned to get another bottle, she raised her own above his head and brought it down with all her might. Without a sound Lieutenant Farrow slid to the floor.

Working swiftly, Kathleen tore his clothes into strips and bound him tightly. When she had finished, she surveyed her work with satisfaction. He would not escape from those bonds unless somebody released him. They had been applied with true SS efficiency.

Picking up Farrow's two steam guns, Kathleen turned and made her way toward the door of the storage hull.

Martin Brand made a final instrument adjustment in the electronics' systems room, which was in his charge. He hoped that the slight reduction in power output he had made would slow up the action of the radar-operated guns. This would give him perhaps three or four minutes more of valuable time, in case he

encountered difficulty in lining up his guns with the bomb bay openings. On this heavily armored ship, a hit on the outer hull would be worse than useless with such a small rifle. Only a direct hit on the bombs would do the trick.

Now, his lips pressed tightly together, Brand made his way down decks toward the launching level for the tiny cruisers the battleship carried. In a few more minutes he would step into one of them, press the button that set the launching mechanism into operation, and would be hurled into space. Once he was out, a quick burst of the rockets, and a speedy dive and loop ought to bring him up with his bow gun pointing directly at his target. He knew he would get time for only one pass at the bomb bays, or at the outside, one more desperate loop at six gravities. He hoped he could hold his senses long enough, in that event, to press the firing lever at the proper instant.

"I'll get 'em the first time!" he muttered.

He made his way without incident past the two operations decks. On deck three he almost ran into a Venusian. He saluted sharply and went on. The man also saluted and went on his way.

He reached the launching deck without seeing anyone else. Quickly he approached the bulkhead door beyond which the cruisers lay. As he neared it, there came a hoarse shout down the long corridor that led to the storage deck. There came the bright flash of a steam gun and a horrid scream of a man in agony. Two more

bright flashes illuminated the corridor, and then came the sound of running feet.

Brand raced desperately for the bulkhead door. He had to get through it and get it closed before those running feet, whatever they meant, came into sight. He cursed the luck that had caused such an unexpected commotion. He had no time to wonder what it was, but steam gun in hand he was racing directly toward those bright flashes.

All at once a racing figure hurled itself into view at the far end of the corridor. Suddenly it slid to a halt, dropped to one knee, and leveled a steam gun. Unable to halt his headlong dash in time to aim his own weapon, Brand dove for the floor.

A sizzling white beam crackled over his prostrate body, and hot metal flew from the wall just behind him. Instantly Brand was on his knees, aiming his steam gun at the figure down the corridor. The newcomer was now erect, taking careful aim at him. Brand's eyes widened and he dropped his gun in stark astonishment.

"Kathleen!" he bellowed, and again hurled his body away from her bolt. Once more she missed and he yelled again. "Kathy! Kathy! It's me—Martin Brand! Don't shoot!"

The figure down the corridor stood stock still for an instant, then slumped to the floor.

Brand leaped to his feet and raced to her side. With one single motion he swept her into his arms and raced back to the bulkhead door leading to the cruisers. He kicked it open, leaped

through, and laid Kathleen down on the floor. He shut the door, bolted it securely, and then picked Kathleen up again. He carried her to the nearest cruiser, locked in its launching ways, and thrust her inside. In an instant he had released the locking mechanism and clambered inside himself.

It took only a few seconds to thrust Kathleen into a shock seat and strap her in. Then he raced for the pilot seat.

He ignored the straps, using only the support bar to hold him fast. Frantically he pressed the starting button, and as soon as the force of the launching acceleration told him the ship was moving toward the exit port, which was opening slowly, he jabbed the rocket lever forward.

Red flame filled the cruiser compartment, and the ship leaped forward like a live thing. It roared out of the exit port before it was even wholly opened, and Brand reeled under a savage shock as the ship smashed the doors outward. But he exulted, because if he failed at his first pass it would be impossible to open the bulkhead door. There'd be no firing at him from the other ships in their cradles.

He hurled the ship into a steep dive, and brought it up tightly in an inside loop. Streaks of white filled the blackness of space. They were the stars passing before his eyes in dizzy passage. The battleship was nowhere in sight, and he strained his eyes to pick it up as he continued around the killing loop. Blackness threatened to sweep over his vision

before it suddenly loomed over him. Then, all at once, he was bearing directly for it, and there in the forepart of the hull were the black openings of the rocket-bomb bays.

Brand pressed the firing studs of the cruiser's bow atomic rifles, and locked them into position. For an agonizing three seconds he bore straight for the openings, then he looped over again, at maximum speed. The blackness before his eyes swept over him like a tide, but all at once it seemed to recede for an instant under an intolerable brilliance. Then it surged up again and this time overwhelmed him. As it did so, his leaden hand pulled the steering lever into neutral . . .

The taste in his mouth was salty and he wondered vaguely why. Then he realized his nose was bleeding profusely. All at once someone swabbed at his face with a large piece of cotton.

"Sissy!" he heard a voice say.

He kept his eyes closed, trying to remember something. Then it came to him, slowly, like a movie in slow motion . . . Kathy's face, racing toward him; white bolts of her steam gun darting at him; whirling action; her body heavy in his arms; the roar of the cruiser rockets; red flame; black space; spinning stars; an ugly, growing black tide over his eyes; a brilliant white flash; blackness, into which her face grew above him . . . He realized that he was opening his eyes. Her face remained before him . . . a Venusian face, slant-eyed, tear-streaked, nose bloody.

"It's a new face," he said. "It fooled me, but I should have known that walk . . ."

"So that's what you were looking at?"

He nodded. "You won't ever be able to hide that gait," he grinned. "It's as Irish as the Sweepstakes."

"You fooled me too. How I failed to recognize the uppity self-pity of Martin Brand, though, I'll never know . . ."

"It's not pity," he retorted, struggling erect to discover himself on the floor beside the pilot seat of the cruiser. "You women seem to have a penchant for showing a man the flat of your back."

"You're not looking at my back now," she said.

He looked at her a long moment. "And I'm never going to," he said, "but where are we? What happened?"

"You blew the battleship up, just like you did the Martian fleet inside the Black Hole."

"So you admit, finally, that I did blow it up?" he demanded. "But let me at that radio—we've got to get a pickup before we get clean out of the solar system . . ."

She pushed him back firmly. "No you don't! I've tried to get you where I've got you for eleven years, and now that we're alone with no chance of being interrupted, I'm not

going to let you radio to anybody. We don't need any help. I've got this ship pointed in an orbit that will bring us to Earth's atmosphere in about forty-eight hours."

"Forty-eight hours? How far are we from Earth?"

"About three thousand miles."

"But that's only two hours away," he said, struggling once more to get up. She pushed him back again.

"Martin Brand, that may be your idea of how to travel, but it's going to take forty-eight hours if I have to back this ship up to do it. And besides . . ."

"Besides what?"

"If you don't wipe that blood off your face, I'm going to kiss you anyway."

He looked up at her and grinned. "Go ahead," he said. "And while you're doing that, I'll try to imagine that's green lipstick on *your* face—sissy!"

A minute later he pulled away frantically, gasping. "I've got to breathe!" he panted. "How many G's do you think a guy can take . . .?"

"I'll tell you—forty-eight hours from now," she said sweetly. "Draw a deep breath—here I come again."

Outside the portholes, the green earth rotated slowly beneath the drifting ship.

THE END

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"DID you hear about it?"

"About what?"

"The niggers, the niggers!"

"What about 'em?"

"Their leaving—pulling out—going away; did you hear?"

"What you mean, 'pulling out,'

how can they do that?"

"They not only can, but they will, and are."

"Just a couple?"

"All of them!"

"No."

"Yes!"

Illustration by Joe Wirt Tullotson



WAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE AIR

By RAY BRADBURY

Slowly the black river moved past, an inexorable tide, bound for a strange, unbelievable rendezvous with a fleet of spaceships that was coming to take them to the promised land, to a land in the sky . . .



"I got to see that. I don't believe it. Where they going—Africa?"

A silence.

"Mars."

"You mean the *planet* Mars?"

"That's right."

The men stood up in the hot shade of the hardware porch. Some one quit lighting a pipe. Somebody else spat out into the hot dust of noon.

"They can't leave, they can't do that."

"They're doing it, anyways."

"Where'd you hear this?"

"It's everywhere, on the radio a minute ago, just come through."

Like a series of dusty statues, the men came to life.

Samuel Teece, the hardware proprietor, laughed uneasily. "I *wondered* what happened to 'Silly.' I sent him on my bike an hour ago, and he ain't come back from Mrs. Bordman's yet. You think that black fool just pedaled off to Mars?"

The men snorted.

"All I say is he better bring back my bike. I don't take stealing from no one, by God."

"Listen!"

Far up the street the levee seemed to have broken, and the black, warm waters descended and engulfed the town. Between the blazing white banks of the town stores, among the silence of trees and men, a black tide flowed. Like a kind of summer molasses, it poured turgidly forth upon the cinnamon-colored dusty road. It surged slowly, slowly, and it was men, women, horses and barking dogs, and it was little boys and girls. From the mouths of the people drifting in this

tide came the sound of a river, a summer-day river going somewhere, murmuring and irrevocable. In that slow steady channel of darkness that cut across the white glare of day, were touches of alert white, the eyes, the ivory eyes staring ahead, glancing aside, as the river, the long and endless river, took itself from old channels into new ones. From various and uncountable tributaries, in creeks and brooks of color and motion, the parts of this river had joined, become one mother current, and flowed on. Brimming the swell were things carried by the river—Grandfather clocks chiming, kitchen clocks ticking, caged hens screaming, and babies wailing. Swimming among the thickened eddies were mules and cats, and sudden excursions of burst mattress springs floating by with hair stuffing sticking out of them. There were boxes and crates and pictures of dark Grandfathers in oak frames—the river flowed on while the men sat like nervous hounds on the hardware porch, their hands empty and it was too late for them to mend the levee.

Samuel Teece wouldn't believe it. "Why, hell, where'd they get the transportation, how they goin' to get to Mars?"

"Rockets," said Grandpa Quartermain.

"Of all the damn fool—rockets ain't *ready* for that yet."

"Yes they are."

"Be another ten years before rockets can go even to the Moon—"

"These are ready."

"I never heard about it."

"Seems these niggers kept it secret, worked on the rockets all themselves, don't know where, in Africa I reckon."

"Could they *do* that?" demanded Samuel Teece, pacing about the porch. "Ain't there a law?"

"It ain't as if they're declarin' war," said Grandpa quietly.

"Where do they get off, god damn it, working' in secret, plottin'?" shouted Teece.

"Schedule is for all this town's niggers to gather out by Loon Lake. Rockets be there at one o'clock, pick 'em up, take 'em to Mars."

"Telephone the governor, call out the militia," cried Teece. "They shoulda given notice!"

"Here comes your woman, Sam."

The men turned again.

As they watched, down the hot road in the windless light, first one white woman and then another arrived, all of them with stunned faces. Some of them were crying, some were stern. All came to find their husbands. They pushed through bar-room swinging doors, vanishing. They entered cool, quiet grocery stores. They went in drug stores and garages. One of them, Mrs. Clara Teece, came to stand in the dust by the hardware porch, blinking up at her stiff and angry husband as the black river flowed behind her.

"It's Lucinda, Pa, you got to come home!"

"I'm not comin' home for no damn darkie!"

"She's leaving, what'll I do with-out her?"

"Fetch for yourself, maybe. I

won't get down on my knees to stop her."

"But she's like a family member!"

"Don't shout! I won't have you blubberin' in public this way about no god damn—"

His wife's small sob stopped him. She dabbed at her eyes. "I kept telling her, Lucinda, I said, 'you stay on and I raise your pay, and you get *two* nights off a week, if you want,' but she just looked set! I never seen her so set, and I said, 'Don't you *love* me, Lucinda,' and she said 'yes,' but she had to go because that's the way it was is all. She cleaned the house, dusted it, put luncheon on the table, and then she went to the parlor door, and stood there with two bundles, one by each foot, and shook my hand and said, 'Goodbye Mrs. Teece.' Then she went out the door. There was her luncheon on the table, and all of us too upset to even eat it."

Teece almost struck her. "God damn it, Mrs. Teece, you get the hell home. Standin' there, makin' a sight of yourself!"

"But, Pa—"

He strode away into the hot dimness of the store, but came back out a few seconds later with a silver pistol in his hand.

His wife was gone.

The river flowed black between the buildings, with a rustle and a creak and a constant whispering shuffle. It was a very quiet thing, with a great certainty to it; no laughter, no wildness, just a steady, decided, and ceaseless flow.

Teece sat on the edge of his hard

wood chair. "If one of 'em so much as laughs, by Christ, I'll kill 'em."

The men waited.

The river passed quietly in the dreamful noon.

"Looks like you goin' to have to hoe your own turnips, Sam," Grandpa chuckled.

"I'm not bad at shootin' white folks neither." Teece didn't look at Grandpa. Grandpa turned his head away and shut up his mouth.

"Hold on there!" Samuel Teece leaped off the porch. He reached up and seized the reins of a horse ridden by a tall negro man. "You, Belter, come down off there!"

"Yes, sir," Belter slid down.

Teece looked him over. "Now, just what you think you're doin'?"

"Well, Mr. Teece—"

"I reckon you think you're goin', just like that song—what's the words? Way up in the middle of the air; ain't *that* it?"

"Yes, sir." The negro waited on him.

"You recollect you owe me fifty dollars, Belter?"

"Yes, sir."

"You tryin' to sneak out? By God, I'll horsewhip you!"

"All the excitement, and it slipped my mind, sir."

"It slipped his mind." Teece gave a vicious wink at his men on the hardware porch. "God damn, Belter, you know what you're goin' to do?"

"No, sir."

"You're stayin' here to work out that fifty bucks, or my name ain't Samuel W. Teece." He turned again

to smile confidently at the men in the shade.

Belter looked at the river going along the street, that dark river flowing and flowing between the shops, the dark river on wheels and horses and in dusty shoes, the dark river from which he had been snatched on his journey. He began to shiver. "Let me go, Mister Teece. I'll send your money from up there, I promise!"

"Listen, Belter." Teece grasped the man's suspenders like two harp-strings, playing them now and again contemptuously, snorted at the sky, and pointed one bony finger straight at God. "Belter, you know anything about what's *up there*?"

"What they tells me."

"What they tells him! Christ! Hear that? What they tells him!" He swung the man's weight by his suspenders, idly, flicking a finger in the black face. "Belter, you fly up and up like a July Fourth rocket and Bang! There you are, cinders, spread all over space. Them crackpot scientists, they don't know nothin', they'll kill you all off!"

"I don't care."

"Glad to hear that, because you know what's up on that planet Mars? There's monsters with big raw eyes like mushrooms! You seen them pictures on those other world magazines you buy at the drug store, ain't you? Well! The monsters jump up and suck marrow from your bones!"

"I don't care, don't care at all, don't care." Belter watched the parade slide by, leaving him. Sweat lay on his dark brow and he seemed about to collapse.

"And it's cold up there—no air, you fall down, jerk like a fish, gaspin', dyin', stranglin', stranglin' and dyin', you *like* that?"

"Lots of things I don't like, sir. Please, sir, let me go. I'm late."

"I'll let you go when I'm *ready* to let you go. We'll just talk here polite until I say you can leave, and you know it damn well. You want to travel, do you? Well, 'Mister Way Up In The Middle of The Air,' you get the hell home and work out that fifty bucks you owe me! Take you two months to do that!"

"But if I work it out, I'll miss the rocket, sir!"

"Ain't that a shame now?" Teece tried to look sad.

"I give you my horse, sir."

"Horse ain't legal tender. You don't move until I get my money." Teece laughed inside. He felt very warm and good.

A small crowd of dark people had gathered to hear all this. Now as Belter stood, head down, trembling, an old man stepped forward.

"Mister?"

Teece flashed him a quick look. "Well?"

"How much this man owe you, mister?"

"None of your damn business!"

The old man looked at Belter. "How much, son?"

"Fifty dollars."

The old man put out his black hands at the people around him. "There's twenty-five of you. Each give two dollars, quick now, this is no time for argument."

"Here, now!" cried Teece, stiffening up tall.

The money appeared. The old man fingered it into his hat and gave the hat to Belter. "Son," he said, "you ain't missin' no rocket."

Belter smiled into the hat. "No sir, I guess I ain't!"

Teece shouted. "You give that money back to them!"

Belter bowed respectfully, handing the money over, and when Teece would not touch it he set it down in the dust at Teece's feet. "There's your money, sir," he said. "Thank you kindly." Smiling, he gained the saddle of his horse and whipped his horse along, thanking the old man who rode with him now until they were out of sight and hearing.

"Son of a bitch," whispered Teece, staring blindly at the sun. "Son of a bitch."

"Pick up the money, Samuel," said someone from the porch.

It was happening all along the way. Little white boys, barefoot, dashed up with the news. "Them that has helps them that hasn't and that way they *all* get free! Seen a rich man give a poor man two hundred bucks to pay off some'un! Seen some'un else give some'un else ten bucks, five bucks, sixteen, lots of that, all over, everybody!"

The white men sat with sour water in their mouths. Their eyes were almost puffed shut, as if they had been struck in their faces by wind and sand and heat.

The rage was in Samuel Teece. He climbed up on the porch and glared at the passing swarms. He waved his

gun. After awhile when he had to do something, he began to shout at anyone, any Negro who looked up at him. "Bang! There's another rocket out in space!" He shouted so all could hear. "Bang! By God!" The dark heads didn't flicker or pretend to hear, but their white eyes slid swiftly over and back. "Crash! All them rockets fallin'! Screamin', dyin'! Bang! God All Mighty, I'm glad I'm right here on old terra firma. As they says in that old joke, the more firma, the less terra! Ha, ha!"

Horses clopped along, shuffling up dust. Wagons bumped on ruined springs.

"Bang!" His voice was lonely in the heat, trying to terrify the dust and the blazing sun sky. "Wham! Niggers all over space! Jerked outa rockets like so many minnows, hit by a meteor, by God! Space fulla meteors. You know that? Sure! Thick as buckshot; powie! Shoot down them tin can rockets like so many ducks, so many clay pipes! Ole sardine cans full of black cod! Bangin' like a stringa ladyfingers, bang, bang, bang! Ten thousand dead here, ten thousand there. Floatin' in space, around and around earth, ever and ever, cold and way out, Lord! You hear that, *yow* there!"

Silence reigned. The river was broad and continuous. It had entered all cotton shacks during the hour, flooded all the valuables out, and it was now carrying the clocks, washboards, the silk bolts and curtain rods on down to some distant black sea.

High tide passed—It was two o'clock—Low tide came. Soon the

river was dried up, the town silent, and the dust settled in a film on the stores, the seated men, and the tall hot trees.

Silence.

The men on the porch listened.

Hearing nothing, they extended their thoughts and their imaginations far out into the surrounding meadows. In the early morning the land had been filled with its usual concoctions of sound. Here and there, with stubborn persistence to custom, there had been voices singing, honey laughter under the mimosa branches, pickaninnies rushing in laughter to the creek, movements in the fields, jokes and shouts of amusement from the shingle shacks covered with fresh green vines.

Now it was as if a great wind had washed the land clean of sounds. Skeleton doors hung open on leather hinges. Rubber tire swings hung in the silent air, uninhabited. The washing rocks at the river were empty, and the watermelon patches, if any, were left alone to heat their hidden liquors in the sun. Spiders started building new webs in abandoned huts, dust started to sift in from unpatched roofs in golden specules. Here and there, a fire forgotten in the last rush, lingered and in a sudden access of strength, fed upon the dry bones of some littered shack. The sound of a gentle feeding burn went up through the silenced air.

The men sat on the hardware porch, not blinking or swallowing.

"I can't figure why they left *now*, with things lookin' up. I mean, every

day they got more rights. What they *want*, anyway? Here's the poll tax gone, and more and more states anti-lynching bills passin', and all kinds of equal rights, what *more* they want? They make almost as good money as a white man, but there they go."

Far down the empty street a bicycle came.

"I'll be god damned, Teece, here comes your 'Silly' now."

The bicycle pulled up before the porch, a seventeen year old colored boy on it, all arms and feet and long legs, and round watermelon head. He looked up at Samuel Teece and smiled.

"So you got a guilty conscience and came back," said Teece.

"No, sir, I just brought the bicycle."

"What's wrong, couldn't get it on the rocket?"

"That wasn't it, sir."

"Don't tell me what it was! Get off, you're not goin' to steal my property!" He gave the boy a push and the bicycle fell. "Get inside and start cleaning the brass."

"Beg pardon?" The boy's eyes widened.

"You heard what I said. There's guns need unpacking there, and a crate of nails just come from Natchez—"

"Mr. Teece."

"And a box of hammers need fixin'—"

"Mr. Teece, sir?"

"You *still* standin' there!" Teece glared.

"Mister Teece, you don't mind, I

take the day off," he said, apologetically.

"And tomorrow and day after tomorrow and the day after the day after that," said Teece.

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"You *should* be afraid, boy. Come here." He marched the boy across the porch and drew a paper out of a desk. "Remember this?"

"Sir?"

"It's your workin' paper, you signed it, there's your x right there, ain't it? Answer me!"

"I didn't sign that, Mister Teece." The boy trembled. "Any one can make an x."

"Listen to this, 'Silly.' Contract: I will work for Mr. Samuel Teece two years, starting July 15, 1962, and if intending to leave will give four weeks notice and continue working until my position is filled. There." Teece slapped the paper, his eyes glittering. "You cause trouble, we'll take it to court."

"I can't do that," wailed the boy, tears starting to roll down his face. "If I don't go today, I don't go."

"I know just how you feel, 'Silly,' yes, sir, I sympathize with you, boy. But we'll treat you good and give you good food, boy, now you just get inside and start working and forget all about that nonsense, eh, 'Silly'? Sure." Teece grinned and patted the boy's shoulder.

The boy turned and looked at the old men sitting on the porch. He could hardly see now for his tears. "Maybe, maybe one of these gentlemen here—" The men looked up in the hot, uneasy shadows, looking first

at the boy and then at Teece.

"You meanin' to say you think a *white man* should take your place, boy?" asked Teece, coldly.

Grandpa Quartermain took his red hands off his knees. He looked out at the horizon thoughtfully and said, "Teece, what about me?"

"What?"

"I'll take 'Silly's' job."

The porch was silent.

Teece balanced himself in the air. "Grandpa," he said, warningly.

"Let the boy go. I'll clean the brass."

"Would you, would you, really?" "Silly" ran over to Grandpa, laughing, tears on his cheeks, unbelieving.

"Sure."

"Grandpa," said Teece. "Keep your damn trap outa this!"

"Give the kid a break, Teece."

Teece walked over and seized the boy's arm. "He's mine. I'm lockin' him in the back room until tonight."

"Don't, Mr. Teece!"

The boy began to sob now. His crying filled the air of the porch. His eyes were tight. Far down the street, an old tin Ford was choking along with a last load of colored people in it. "Here comes my family, Mr. Teece, oh, please, please, oh God, please!"

"Teece," said one of the other men on the porch, getting up, "let him go."

Another man rose also. "That goes for me, too."

"And me," said another.

"What's the use?" The men all talked now. "Cut it out, Teece."

"Let him go."

Teece felt for his gun in his pocket. He saw the men's faces, took his hand away, and left the gun in his pocket and said, "So that's how it is?"

"That's how it is," someone said.

Teece let the boy go. "All right. Get out!" He jerked his hand back in the store. "But I hope you don't think you're gonna leave any trash behind to clutter my store."

"No, sir!"

"You clean everything outa your shed in back; burn it."

"Silly" shook his head. "I'll take it with."

"They won't let you put it on that damn rocket."

"I'll take it with," insisted the boy, softly.

He rushed back through the hardware store. There were sounds of sweeping and cleaning out and a moment later he appeared, his hands full of tops and marbles and old dusty kites and junk collected through the years. Just then the old tin Ford drove up and "Silly" climbed in and the door slammed. Teece stood on the porch with a bitter smile on his face. "What you goin' to do *up there*?"

"Startin' new," said "Silly." "Gonna have my *own* hardware."

"God damn it, you been learnin' my trade so you could run off and use it!"

"No, sir, I never thought one day *this'd* happen, sir, but it did. I can't help if I learned, Mister Teece."

"I suppose you got names for your rockets?"

They looked at their one clock on

the dashboard of the car.

"Yes, sir."

"Like Elijah and the Chariot, The Big Wheel and The Little Wheel, Faith, Hope and Charity, eh?"

"We got names for the ships, Mister Teece."

"God the Son and the Holy Ghost, I wouldn't wonder? Say, boy, you got one named the First Baptist Church?"

"We got to leave now, Mister Teece."

Teece laughed. "You got one named Swing Low, and another named Sweet Chariot?"

The car started up. "Goodbye, Mister Teece."

"You got one named Roll Dem Bones?"

"Goodbye, Mister!"

"And another called Over Jordan! Ha! Well, tote that rocket, boy, lift that rocket, boy, go on, get blown up, see if I care!"

The car churned off into the dust. The boy rose up and cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted one last time at Teece. "Mister Teece, Mister Teece, what you goin' to do nights from now on, what you goin' to do nights, Mister Teece?"

Silence. The car faded down the road. It was gone.

"What in hell did he mean?" mused Teece. "What am I goin' to do nights?"

He watched the dust settle and it suddenly came to him.

He remembered nights when men drove to his house, their knees sticking up sharp and their shotguns stick-

ing up sharper, like a car full of cranes, under the night trees of summer, their eyes mean. Honking the horn and him slamming his door, a gun in his hand, laughing to himself, his heart racing like a ten year old, driving off down the summer night road, a ring of hemp rope coiled on the car floor, fresh shell boxes making every man's coat look bunchy. How many nights over the years, how many nights of the wind rushing in the car, flopping their hair over their eyes, roaring, as they picked a tree, a good strong tree, and rapped on a shanty door!

"So *that's* what the son of a bitch meant?" Teece leaped out into the sunlight. "Come back, you bastard! What am I goin' to do nights, why that lousy, insolent son of a—"

It was a good question. He sickened and was empty. Yes. What *will* we do nights? he thought. Now *they're* gone, what? He was absolutely empty and numb.

He pulled the pistol from his pocket, checked its shells.

"What you goin' to do, Sam?" someone asked.

"Kill that son of a bitch!"

Grandpa said, "Don't get yourself heated."

But Samuel Teece was gone around behind the store. A moment later he drove out the drive in his open-top car. "Anyone comin' with me?"

"I'd like a drive," said Grandpa, and got up.

"Anyone else?"

Nobody replied.

Grandpa got in and slammed the door. Samuel Teece gutted the car



out in a great whorl of dust. They didn't speak as they rushed down the road under the bright sky. The heat from the dry meadows was shimmering.

They stopped at a cross-roads. "Which way'd they go, Grandpa?"

Grandpa squinted. "Straight on ahead, I figure."

They went on. Under the summer trees, their car made a lonely sound. The road was empty and as they drove along they began to notice something. Teece slowed the car and bent out, his yellow eyes fierce.

"God damn it, Grandpa, you see what them bastards did?"

"What?" asked Grandpa, and looked.

Where they had been carefully set down and left, in neat bundles every few feet along the empty country road, were old roller skates, a bandana full of knick-knacks, some old shoes, a cart-wheel, stacks of pants and coats and ancient hats, bits of Oriental crystal that had once tinkled in the wind, tin cans of pink

geraniums, dishes of waxed fruit, cartons of Confederate money, wash tubs, scrubboards, washlines, soap, somebody's tricycle, someone else's hedge-shears, a toy wagon, a jack-in-the-box, a stained-glass window from the Negro Baptist Church, a whole set of brake rims, inner tubes, mattresses, couches, rocking chairs, jars of cold cream, hand mirrors. None of it flung down, no, but deposited gently and with feeling, with decorum, upon the dusty edges of the road, as if a whole city had walked here with hands full, at which time a great bronze trumpet had sounded, the articles had been relinquished to the quiet dust, and one and all, the inhabitants of the earth had fled straight up into the blue heavens.

"Wouldn't burn them, they said," cried Teece angrily. "No, wouldn't burn them like I said, but had to take them along and leave them where they could see them for the last time, on the road, all together and whole. Them niggers think they're smart."

He veered the car wildly, mile after mile, down the road, tumbling, smashing, breaking, scattering bundles of paper, jewel boxes, mirrors, chairs. "There, by damn, and *there!*"

The front tire gave a whistling cry. The car spilled crazily off the road into a ditch, flinging Teece against the glass.

"Son of a bitch." He dusted himself off and stood out of the car, almost crying with rage.

He looked at the silent empty road. "We'll never catch them now, never, never." As far as he could see

there was nothing but bundles and stacks and more bundles neatly placed like little abandoned shrines in the late day, in the warm blowing wind.

Teece and Grandpa came walking tiredly back to the hardware store an hour later. The men were still sitting there, listening, and watching the sky. Just as Teece sat down and eased his tight shoes off, someone cried, "Look!"

"I'll be damned if I will," said Teece.

But the others looked, and they saw the golden bobbins rising in the sky, far away. Leaving flame behind, they vanished.

In the cotton fields, the wind blew

idly among the snowclusters. In still further meadows the watermelons lay, unfingerprinted, striped as tortoise cats lying in the sun.

The men on the porch sat down, looked at each other, looked at the yellow rope piled neat on the store shelves, glanced at the gun shells glinting shiny brass in their cartons, saw the silver pistols and long black metal shotguns hung high and quiet in the shadows. Somebody put a straw in his mouth. Someone else drew a figure in the dust.

Finally, Samuel Teece held his empty shoe up in triumph, turned it over, stared at it and said, "Did you notice? Right up to the very last, by God, he said 'Mister!'"

THE END

NEWS OF THE MONTH

Latest reports on what our readers are doing. Fan clubs, social events and personalities in the limelight.

THE *Scientific Cycle* is coming, fans! Plans are popping in Hollywood—all over the world—to fascinate film-goers with wonders out of this world! Inevitably, an increasing number of outright fantasies will be produced too.

First on the docket, as everyone by now must know, is *DESTINATION MOON*, the technicolor trip to our satellite. Laid in 1960, this prophetic picture (adapted from Robt. Heinlein's book, "Rocket Ship *Galileo*") will soon be released. A number of other interplanetary films will follow. RKO writer Ed Earl Repp, author of "The Radium Pool" and "The Stellar Missiles," has prepared a script entitled "Operation Luna." Academy award winner John Ford is interested in doing "Men of Mars."

Paramount owns the following properties: "Rossum's Universal Robots," the original android play by Karel Capek; "Food of the Gods," the adventure into giant size by H. G. Wells; "The Island of Dr. Moreau," the evolutionary yarn of beasts-intomankind, already once produced under the title of "The Island of Lost Souls" with Chas. Laughton, worth either reviving or refilming; Wells' famous invasion from Mars, "War of the Worlds"; M. P. Shiel's last-man-in-the-world classic, "The Purple Cloud"; and an original, "50 Years from Now," worked on by Philip Wylie and the late science fiction author, Joe Skidmore. Certainly "Dr. Cyclops," the Curt Siodmak technicolor experience-in-smallness, is ripe for revival. Fans—write Paramount, urging the reshewing and production of

your favorites of the foregoing titles.

The King Bros., independent producers, own a property titled "Bandits on the Moon," the very antithesis of "Destination Moon," the former being a space-chase with ray-guns and all the trimmings, whereas the latter is a strictly matter-of-fact Moon movie. Delayed in production since 1947, "Bandits on the Moon" will now no doubt go back on an early shooting schedule. It's to be a million dollar production. The King Bros. have also announced plans to produce an atomic prophecy entitled "1965."

The famous date novel, "1984" by Geo. Orwell, having meteorized to best-seller class and been successfully dramatized on the radio, will next be seen as a play. It is my prediction that it will be one of the hit films of 1951.

Fritz Lang, the scientifiemaestro of "Metropolis" and "Girl in the Moon" fame, is scheduled to direct a drama of the future titled "Tomorrow," an original screenplay by Sylvia Richards. (Sylvia adapted Lovecraft's "Dunwich Horror" to the radio.) Lang also expressed, to your reporter, an interest in doing Lovecraft's "Shadow Over Innsmouth," "The Machine to Kill" by Gaston Leroux, and van Vogt's SLAN!

Speaking of van Vogt, he and E. Mayne Hull have collaborated on a 22nd century television show, introducing a new character of the future, Pell Melton. Two chapters have been filmed. Artwork by the prominent fan artist, Bill Rotsler.

Edgar Rice Burroughs' immortal apeman will next be seen in the jungle adventures of "Tarzan and the Golden Lion" and "Tarzan and the Slave Girl."

Disney's plans include feature length fantastical cartoons on "Peter Pan," "The Little People," "The Sword in the Stone" and "Alice in Wonderland." There is the possibility of importation from France of a puppetoon version of "Alice," and a third version is scheduled for filming in England. The 4th—and original—version, with many American stars in rubberoid suits and mask (a la "Wizard of Oz") has been recently revived in several cities. There is a possibility of Margaret O'Brien doing "Wizard of Oz" on video.

Ray Bradbury's prize-winning O. Henry Memorial Award fantasy, "Homecoming," may be televised this Halloween.

"Isle of Zorda" by Jules Verne has been announced for production by Lippert. Also

the old master's "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea."

Wm. Dieterle hopes to make "The Lonely Steeple," described as an American "Wuthering Heights."

"Francis," the comedy of a talking mule, may be playing when you read this.

A World Federalist in Hollywood has produced an amateur sound film in color showing Atomageddon as viewed from our satellite. It has been televised.

In England, a fulllength cartoon, "Amin and Aladdin's Lamp," has been produced, and may possibly be imported.

A current import is "The Iron Crown," an Italian fantasy combining elements of Tarzan with the fable of Beauty and the Beast.

From the pages of *Saturday Evening Post* is scheduled to come a fantasy film called "Morning Star" by John Spencer Carr.

Intiguing is the word for the scheduled title, "Lady in Space."

James Mason and Ava Gardner have been mentioned as costars for the supernatural legend of "The Flying Dutchman."

And what visions RKO's mysterious title conjures up: "Dead Planet"!

Murray Leinster tells me of television interest in his "First Contact" (earthmen meet interstellar men in deep space) and movie feelers towards his "Murder of the U. S. A."

Curtis Harrington, producer of the surrealistic film "Youthful Narcissus," is seeking rights to production of Donald Wandrei's *Esquire* fantasy, "The Eye and the Finger."

René Lafayette reveals that his immortal character, Doc Methuselah, will be seen on the screen in an adaptation of his astounding story, "Plague."

Ray Harryhausen, the scientist who saw "King Kong" 75 times and then became chief animator himself on "Mighty Joe Young," is now busy on a bush-hush successor, "Land of the Mist."

MGM, who did "The Beginning or the End," is preparing to follow up with David Bradley's "No Place to Hide." Atomageddon, here we come!

"The Apple Has Been Eaten," a fantasy of Adam and Eve, is a German film which may be playing the "art" theaters one of these days. Watch your local "little" cinemas for these too: "Lucky Star" by Owen Rutter, a British film about an island in

the sky; "Baron Munchhausen," a German technicolor treat of fantastic adventures on the Moon; "The Chips Are Down," a French existensionalist view of life after death; and, if its rescue can be effected, a Bavarian thriller—"Space Ship No. 1 Starts!"

Fans should bring pressure at this time on 20th Century-Fox to revive its musical-comedy of a trip to Mars in 1960, "Just Imagine." An ideal companion revival would be "It's Great to Be Alive" (when *masculitis* wipes out every man in the world but one, leaving the female population untouched—"JUST IMAGINE"!)

Another scientific film which 20th-Fox should be encouraged to revive is "6 Hours to Live," story of a scientific Lazarus. This might go well with the same star, Warner Baxter, in another film of the survival of personality, "Earthbound."

Universal International owns many scientific film properties, and I feel it will not be long before they start to put them into production. Then we may look forward to such fascinating themes as a machine to foretell the future (Edwin Balmer's "The Billionaire") and the menace of the mechanical man in Abner J. Geluk's *Amazing "Automaton."*

I would not be at all surprised to see revivals of "Donovan's Brain," "The Devil Commands" (adapted from Wm. Sloane's sf novel, "The Edge of Running Water"), "The Man They Could Not Hang," "The Man with 8 Lives," "The Invisible Ray" and perhaps Thorne Smith's "Nite Life of the God's."

MGM already has a great deal of footage shot on a full-scale fantasy titled "War Eagles," about an attack on New York by rocs and winged men! Same studio owns a robot property, "Sasha Gerhart," in case Paramount should produce "RUR."

RKO has two untitled scientific films up its sleeve, one about a gigantic underground cavern beneath the United States, with an opening to the sea, and how a boatload of men, having harpooned a whale, are dragged to a lost world as the sea beast makes for its death waters; the other, a super adventure which may be made in Mexico—featuring a battle between a bull and a dinosaur!

Rider Haggard's "King Solomon's" Mines has been announced for refilming.

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE, the Balmer-Wylie classic, will not only be shot

in technicolor but may feature a fabulous climax in *Frescosfilm*, a 3-dimensional process without glasses!

Paulette Goddard will star in Steinbeck's strange "Cup of Gold." Casting of her has also been announced for Thorne Smith's "Stray Lamb" and Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World"!

If the sequence is retained in the final editing, "Jet Pilot" will show John Wayne being buzzed by a flying saucer!

In England a jet pilot picture of the future is now playing a circuit of 3500 theaters. One scene shows the jetter as a boy, reading a copy of NEW WORLDS (the OTHER WORLDS of across the Pond).

In case you missed it, you may still have time to catch at the second run theaters an amusing scientific film called "Free for All," about the synthesis out of seven simple substances of a pill that will turn water into gasoline! The inventor gets into plenty of hot H₂O!

Chesley Bonestell, illustrator of "The Conquest of Space," would like to privately produce a black-and-white short subject concerning a trip to the Moon.

"The Man from Another Star" is the title of a German-made comedy of a tourist of the Universe who makes the mistake of stopping on Earth (in modern Europe) without a passport, ration coupons, and all the rest of the vital paraphernalia!

Another German postwar fantasy is "The Strange Adventure of Mr. Fridolin B."

And announced for production in Germany is a fantasy, "The Lost Face."

"A Nite in the Life of the LASFS" is being filmed, directed by fan Walt Daugherty, produced by fan Morrie Dollens. The LASFS is the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Socy, which in the past 15 years has held over 600 meetings. Reenacted will be a typical meeting, showing such enthusiasts as A. E. van Vogt, Ray Bradbury, Weaver Wright, E. Mayne Hull, Jean Cox, Wendyne Mondelle, E. Everett Evans, Russ Hodgkins, Ross Rocklynne, Alan and Freddie Hershey, Bryce Walton and many others of the local group "in action" in the club room with its big library of prozines and its walls covered with original illustrations by Paul, Finlay, Bok, Cartier, and all the favorites. Film may be exhibited at the forthcoming "Norwescon," the 8th World Science Fiction Convention, to be held over

Labor Day in Portland, Ore.

A South Sea Island witch doctor inflicts his spells on New York in a musicomedy fantasy being written for Broadway entitled "7 Days Wonder."

Hiding behind the innocuous title of "Spring" is an unusual Russian scientifilm about the processing of power from the sun!

Scheduled for reissue is one of the top fantasy films of the past, "Here Comes Mr. Jordan," starring Claude Rains. The author of "Mr. Jordan" has done a new fantasy about an angel and an unborn child—Clifton Webb will play the angel!

"Marvin, the Successful Ghost," a *This Week* ghostly, will be filmed as a two-reeler by Warners.

MGM will produce the unique *Cosmopolitan* story, "The Next Voice You Hear" The "Voice" is not Frank Sinatra but God, talking over the radio!

Faust rides again in "The Beauty of the Devil," being filmed in Italy by René Clair.

The leprechaun play, "Finian's Rainbow," is to be turned into a movie with Barry Fitzgerald

"The Legend of Good Women" will star Sonny Tufts as Hercules if Hollywood has its way.

"Heigh-Ho, Broomstick," a story of witchcraft in Salem, may make a Halloween debut in play form.

A film which can be rented privately from A. F. Films of New York is titled "Fact and Fantasy" and revolves around 5 scientific subjects, including space flight and perpetual motion.

A future episode in RKO's "This Is America" series will feature werewolves, vampires, zombies, etc., if enuf fantastic footage can be found. Dealing with American superstitions, title will be "Hoodoo."

The time-travel fantasy, "Boys from Syracuse," may be remade, this time in Italy.

An ambitious play about reincarnation, Atlantis, etc.—"Lull Abi"—has just been finished in Hollywood by Louie Lovelace, and is being offered in the East

Nelson Bond is becoming well known on television. As TV shows are often kinetoscoped for future re-presentation, they

somewhat qualify in the category of films. His "Conqueror's Isle," story of supermen on the Earth today, has been telecast, as have his ubiquitous "Lobbies," and the old *Unknown* favorite, "Cartwright's Camera." Republic Studios own his *Blue Book* fantasy, "The Magic Staircase."

H. G. Wells' immortal "Time Machine" has twice appeared in elaborate video form in England.

Algernon Blackwood himself has just finished working on a series of 6 of his short fantastic stories at Wembley Studios in England

Culled from recent publicity releases are the following titles, which columnists say are scheduled for production. Several will undoubtedly be serials. I am skeptical that all the titles will ever reach the screen; nevertheless, where there's smoke there's liable to be a pillar of fire—supporting a rocket! Here are the titles: "Rocket Men Are Coming," "Rocket Man on the Moon," "King of the Rocket Men," "Rocket Men on Mars," "Rocket to the Moon" and "Trip to the Moon" (the latter supposed to be based on the original Jules Verne novel, and to be filmed partly in France, partly in Holland and partly in the USA). There is also "The Disc Men Are Coming."

Just as the science fiction magazine is replacing the mystery pulp, as the detective book is giving way to the sf novel, as tales of other worlds are appearing with increasing frequency on the air (Williamson's "With Folded Hands" and Leinster's "First Contact" are scheduled on NBC, and the *Satevepost* "Outer Limit" saucer story was recently broadcast); so scientific fiction is now spreading like wildfire to the screen. Under consideration for filming are A. Merritt's "The Fox Woman," Hugo Gernsback's "Ralph 124C41+," Heinlein's "Waldo" and "Magic, Inc.," Wm. Temple's "Four-Sided Triangle" and Oscar Friend's "Kid from Mars" (wouldn't Danny Kaye be terrific in the rôle?) "The Big Eye" has also been rumored for both radio and film.

It is not beyond the bounds of believability that one of your favorite stories from OTHER WORLDS will one day be filmed!

PLAN NOW TO GO TO THE NORWESCONI

LETTERS

Bert Lang

You were so right. *Dear Devil* is one of the tenderest stories I have ever read with the possible exception of *Only A Mother* which appeared in ASF some time ago. Eric Frank Russell must be a genius to turn a monstrous, ugly being into a creature of compassion, love and beauty.

In *War Of Nerves* the bird beings are hairy and so is the story. This story is definitely not the van Vogt best.

... And *All For One* has a decidedly different twist. Ugh! I will always have an aversion to fat meat.

Do you want me to avoid women, especially beautiful ones? *Portrait Of Narcissus* scares the heck out of me.

Edmund Lalimer's Milking Machine is a fairly good yarn but I find it easy to forget.

Colossus is very good. Although I do not particularly like "explanation" type stories, this one is very well written and shows great promise for the forthcoming *Colossus II*.

I like stories about the conquest of space.
P. O. Box 224,
Schoolfield, Va.

In the following letter, your opinion of *Colossus* is reversed. You might find a difference of opinion interesting in the light of your use of the word "explanation."—Rap.

Don Bugbee

I enjoy reading OTHER WORLDS very much. However, I was disappointed and distressed when I read the story, *Colossus* by S. J. Byrne. It was a very good story, but how did the obvious socialistic-communist propaganda slip by you or your managing editor? I cannot believe that you published it intentionally.

I am an industrial editor, and much information as well as examples of the "party-line" comes across my desk. Industrial editors throughout the nation are combatting the socialistic trend toward the "welfare" or "nationalized" state. We perhaps better than any others can see the effects upon our workers of the empty promises, and the false hopes which are offered them.

The readers of science fiction are particu-

larly vulnerable to propaganda, either good or bad. A majority of the fans, by their very interest in science fiction, are dreamers and visionaries, and, as such, inclined to be somewhat impractical. I hope I don't see any more socialistic propaganda in OTHER WORLDS.

Not only did I object to the propaganda as such, but it was clumsy. It weakened the structure of an otherwise excellent story. In the first place, such a universalization of social enterprises could not exist without regimentation. In the second, when have "trade guilds" ever produced sufficient goods without incentive? Actually in the light of present and past events, Mr. Byrne's concept of a socialistic "Utopia" is absolutely cockeyed.

If such as he describes ever came to pass, there would be no authors—only state controlled propagandists—no science fiction, for it would not contribute anything to the state.

R. R. 1, Box 273A
Plainfield, Indiana

First, Mr. Bugbee, nothing slipped by us. Nor did we insert anything intentionally. Since science fiction began, its authors have depicted imaginary worlds of the future. They DID depict the Great Britain of today, and the Russia of today. They wrote stories of Utopias, and long ago decided they were impractical. You are just behind the times on that.

As for readers of science fiction being particularly vulnerable to propaganda, good and bad, nothing could be further from the truth. Of any popular reading group in the world, the sf fan is the least susceptible to having his thinking done for him. That's why he reads science fiction!

There is a great danger in misunderstanding words. Community does not mean communism. Mr. Byrne, who uses the word, is branded by you as a purveyor of an "obvious party-line." In short, you are calling him a red and saying he is subversive. We know Mr. Byrne personally, and he is NOT even pink. He is working loyally now, on Guam, for the Nation of which he is proud, the good old USA.

It is regrettable that your President does not seem to be combatting the trend toward the "welfare" state you mention.

I am sure that our readers will resent being called dreamers and visionaries. Certainly that they are impractical. If you but know how impractical. Today the editorial offices are filled with those same impractical fans who now edit, publish, and run the magazines they once read. If you can name one editor who isn't, we'd be right glad to know his name. It seems to us they were practical enough to go out and gain control and earn very good livings in their dreams and visions.

Naturally we don't argue politics in *OTHER WORLDS*, even though our writers are free to envision any sort of imaginary world of the future they care to—and point out its weaknesses and its strengths—but we might mention the Co-Ops, especially in Wisconsin, which are really trade guilds, and they are doing a marvelous job of keeping prices down among the people who are facing real financial problems. The incentive to achieve a thing has nothing to do with politics, but with personal needs and desires. It's the dreamers who dream the dreams that the workers bring about. We all dream of a perfect civilization where happiness and free from want and fear is a reality. Today there is no freedom anywhere in the world from fear. Perhaps not even our writers can imagine the real reason—but certainly it is not because of any group of well-meaning people working together for the common good.

The only way we could prevent what you so greatly fear would be to edit every sociological opinion out of our magazine—which seems to us to be dictatorship of the worst sort. *OTHER WORLDS*—controlled propaganda, you might call it, and we doubt if it would contribute anything to the state!—Rap.

John C. Strole

When *OTHER WORLDS* hit the newsstand I decided it was going to be another cheap FANTASY and S. F. pulp mag, with the accept on pure fantasy, but I felt what could I lose? Previously only ASF would satisfy my desire for top-grade science fiction. Pleasant surprise! January: fair, March: good, May: even better. I suggest you start a department such as The

Analytical Laboratory. Your overall quality approaches very closely that of ASF. Keep it up.

18 Cooper Place,
Weehawken, N. J.

Beginning with the October issue, we'll institute a department which will let you know how the stories and articles rated. We'll try to dream up something practical and interesting.

D. Bruce Berry

Dear Ray. I'm being personal, see? I figure I can do it because I have followed your work ever since you started editing *Amazing Stories*. That shows you something of how long I've been reading science fiction. Sixteen years, to be exact. That rates me an old timer.

During that time, I wrote to you only once. That was to object to the slaying of Martin Brand. It was a short letter of fifty words (or around that) and you placed it at the top of the readers' column. So now you are reviving Brand. Swell! And he had better be alive!

This breaking of my long silence is to serve a twofold purpose, though. The second item is this: You have mentioned that you are turning out a sister magazine to *OTHER WORLDS*. Stop! Hold the presses! I would have a fatherly chat with you.

Your present mag is tops. It is working its way toward being the answer to the readers' prayer. There is only one fault with it. It is not a monthly. Now, instead of adding to your woes and confusion by dividing your time between two mags, why not make *OTHER WORLDS* a monthly publication? In this manner you could devote your time to turning out a superior mag (which you have). Remember the worth of a perfect jewel is in its rarity.

1438 Madison Street,
Oakland 12, Calif.

Well, this issue ought to make you happy. Brand is here, and alive!

As for our new magazine, it will come out August 1. Also, *OTHER WORLDS* WILL BEGIN COMING OUT EVERY SIX WEEKS with its October issue. And eventually it will become monthly. You get all that and the new magazine too. And the new magazine will come out monthly

eventually also. You readers have shown us you'll read a good magazine, and we're going to give you two of them. Lord knows the field needs it!—Rap.

Bill (Bill Who?)

The covers get better and better. The stories get better and better. The illustrations get better and better. The departments get better and more so. And the editorials . . . Oh my! It's a pleasure and a big charge just to read them. I must say you deserve a pat on the back for breaking away from the old dry policy of reviewing a current scientific development in the so-called editorials and filling 'em with some good ol' babblings of Ye Ed., and droolery.

There is, however, one field in which a competitor is beating you out. I'm referring to that new magazine, **FUTURE AND SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES**. They—they are offering \$2.00 per letter published. Much as I enjoy writing to you and the other mags, when one progressive editor offers payment for fan-letters—well, who ever heard of a fan who couldn't use two bucks? I feel the time is ripe to call a letter-strike, organizing the letter writing fans to refrain from writing to any mag that does not pay for letters. Only one trouble . . . some cold blooded editor might reciprocate by deleting the letter column altogether. You wouldn't do that, would you Rap, dear boy?

All foolishness aside, let's see how the last ish looked. What an excellent cover! Seems to me that other mags might do well to emulate your policy and keep those naked dames off the covers. Next, I think you deserve another laurel-wreath for not using that rough-cut edge on your mags. I must complain to Merwin about this—some mags scatter confetti all over the floor from those masticated edges as you read 'em. Makes your clothes look a mess too. Another thing: I disagree with Ed Wood on the quality of paper you use. My experience is that **OTHER WORLDS** says together where other mags are coming apart at the seams. The pages stay in, too. Miraculous but true.

And one last ululation. Don't know if anyone mentioned it before, but boy-o-boy, no ads cluttering up the back of the book. That wunnerful! How can you do it? But it's great to wade through a story without having ads by the Rosicrucians and

Charles Atlas cluttering up your train of thought. And say, that is a good feature about *Destination Moon*. Give us some more info on big events like that. Like a feature on the coming *Norwescon*.

33 Park Place, R. D. #4
Pittsburgh 9, Pa.

Now, Bill. . . There are quite a few reasons why we don't think it's wise to pay \$2.00 for letters. First, we want to know that our readers are writing what they write because they want to let us know what they think about the magazine, actually, and not just to make two bucks. Second, we certainly don't have to bribe our readers to write in—we get hundreds of letters we can't find room to print. Third, we once offered to pay for letters in *Amazing Stories*, and we actually got fewer letters! You see, our readers are of the same mind we are.

As for naked dames on our cover, we certainly aren't going to make them a policy. The present cover, and the coming September cover represent what we think real science fiction covers should be—but we'll present a Mac Girl when we get one—and we've got one—because she's just too darn beautiful not to print. There's a difference, you know. When McCauley paints a Mac Girl, it's like a Petty in *Esquire*, as against a Superwoman in a comic book.

Glad you like our no-confetti-spreading magazine's edges. We always swore at the delay in turning the page at an exciting passage, and many's the time we tore the page trying to find that darn edge. In **OTHER WORLDS**, you just sip with your thumb and tingle, there you are!

Oh Bill. . . Now we've got a Rosicrucian ad and a couple other ads. Hope you won't be mad at us, but when we tell you they helped pay for that front cover . . . Anyway, you won't see any Scabby Foot ads.

As for that feature on the *Norwescon*, you got something, pal! We'll get right on the ball, October issue, coming up! With no time to spare!—Rap.

Roger N. Dard

I read the first issue of your publication some time ago, and although it was interesting enough, I felt it did not come up to my expectations. I did not see number 2,

but just recently number 3 arrived, and I was amazed at the tremendous improvement. As a result, my disinterest has now changed to one of enthusiasm.

By far the best feature of the entire publication is your editorial. I do not know if you are aware of it or not, Mr. Palmer, but your editorials are revolutionary. Their candor, your complete lack of fear or favor, the way you name names,

and criticize and praise your competitors is nothing short of staggering. Another feature greatly appreciated is the *Personals* page. Once again, you are first into the field with a free service to your readers. The pocket size, however, does not appeal to me.

232 James Street,
Perth, Western Australia,

When ends Letters for this month.—Rap.

PERSONALS

ATTENTION: Anyone with information as to the present whereabouts of David A. MacInnes please notify Don Ford, 129 Maple, Sharonville, Ohio. MacInnes was last heard of in Sandy Springs, Maryland and is now believed to be in Canada, presumably Toronto . . . Burton R. Terrell, Pekin, Ind. would like to hear from anyone who has seen flying disks or believes that invisible beings walk the earth . . . Roger Nelson, 627 Robinson, San Diego, Calif. has a collection of sf and fantasy books which he is selling 3/\$1 and has some magazines to sell or trade. He wants copies of books by Cummings, Wheatley, Kline, Stapledon and Merritt . . . Guy A. Gosselein, Gorham, N. Hamp. wants to correspond with amateur astronomers . . . Carl H. Geist, 2323 W. Ainslie St., Chicago 25, Ill. has for sale *Unknown Worlds* 1948 Anthology, AS March thru Sept. 1948, FA Oct. '44, Mar. '48, May thru Sept. '48 and the first 8 issues starting May, 1939 . . . Fans wishing to join The Science-Fantasy Society write to Calvin T. Beck, Box 877, Grand Central Station, New York 17, N. Y. If you live in or near Cleveland, O., ask Cal for information on the Cleveland chapter of the S.F.S. . . . The Universal Musketeers, an up-and-coming fan club announces that it has a free library for the use of members, as well as five fanzines which all members receive free. Interested fans should write Ronald Friedman, 1980 E. 8th St., Brooklyn 23, N. Y. If you live in the vicinity of Norfolk, Suffolk, Newport News, Richmond or Tidewater, Virginia get in touch with Jack Schwab, 58 Greene Blvd., Portsmouth, Va. . . . Wanted, by F. J. Ackerman, 2364 N. New Hampshire, Hollywood 4, Calif., Canadian WT '33-'38; *Science & Invention*,

Aug. '23, Dec '24; stills from *The Sky Splitter*, *Just Imagine*, *Metropolis*, *Our Heavenly Bodies*, *By Rocket to the Moon*, *Mysterious Island*, *RUR*, *High Treason*, *First Men in the Moon*; addresses of Slater LaMaster, Albert DePina, Cordwainer Smith, Ree Dragonette, Leslie Rubenstein, Evi Detring Nathan, Andrew Lenard, Eleanor McGeary; issues of *Orchideengarten*, *Thrill Book*, *Fantastica*, *Shuster & Siegel's Science Fiction*, first 2 yrs. Buck Rogers Sunday strips; any gold or silver artwork by Paul; *Science Fiction League* lapel emblem; *Science Fiction Ass'n.* rocket tie; \$1,000,000 to keep up with science-fiction . . . Will trade *Weapon Makers*, *Outsider*, *Futura Fantasia*, *Acolytes*, *Worm Ouroboros*, *Fantazius Mallare* for—what rarities have you? The Case of the Baroque Baby Killer: Bradbury, 5c; The Mystery of the 33 Stolen Idioms: Keller, 50c; *Invasion from Mars* text; Welles, 15c; *Monsters of the Moon*, *Scientifilmmemento*, 25c; *Fan Artists Portfolio*, 75c; *Bok Artfolio*, \$1.50. Contact Weaver Wright, Box 6151 Metro Station, Los Angeles 55, Calif. . . . Mrs. June Leeds Moore, 1112 Turk Street, San Francisco 15, Calif. would like pen pals who are interested in metaphysics . . . Tom Moulton, 15 Fordway Ave., Blackpool, Lancashire, England will exchange English fantasy books for back issues of *Fate*, *Other Worlds*, and other sf magazines . . . Wanted. Reports on Flying Saucers. Readers who have seen mysterious objects in the sky, and who can report accurate details, please send your report to Robert N. Webster, editor *FATE*, 1144 Ashland, Evanston, Illinois . . . This is your column; send in your personals for publication, on any subject. Exchange penpals—or heads. Anything goes.



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Pictured below is the famous artist, J. Allen St. John, whose inspired pictorial representations of Tarzan and John Carter helped skyrocket Burroughs' stories to fame. The illustration is the frontispiece for "Tarzan and The Golden Lion."



The picture above is the last ever taken of Edgar Rice Burroughs. The group depicts (left to right) Vernell Coriell, a well-known Burroughs fan; Mike Pierce, Burroughs' grandson; Lex Barker, newest of the film Tarzans, and (seated) Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Tars Tarkas and his green men, the red men of Helium, the headless Rykors, the Holy Therns, the Black Pirates, Thoats, Zitidars, Dejah Thoris and John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom. The last of the Martian series, *Skeleton Men of Jupiter*, was never completed. The third popular creation in the Burroughs saga is the *Pellucidar* series featuring David Innes.

Carson of Venus is another newer sci-

ence fiction hero. In addition to all these, Burroughs wrote at least three other books that stand out as classics of fantasy. And now the world has learned that Tarzan's creator is dead. It has come as a shock to millions of his readers, young and old, because they had almost come to hope he was immortal, like his own fantastic creations. Edgar Rice Burroughs will always be considered as an outstanding example of what may be accomplished with the opportunities of the American way of life. He took merely his incredible imagination and with it earned a fortune of over ten million dollars. Burroughs never claimed that his stories had any great literary value. He was modest to a fault. An editorial in *Fortune* said that "some of his stories are not so hot, but they sell—an argument that admits of no rebuttal." When asked about his rules for writing back in 1945, he replied: "In all these years I have not learned one single rule for writing fiction or anything else. I still write as I did thirty years ago; stories which I feel would entertain me and give me mental relaxation, knowing that there are millions of people just like me who will like the same things that I like." Therein lies his greatest achievement—he has entertained and relaxed billions of people and the world is the better for it!



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